Metalsmith

FALL 1991
VOLUME II NUMBER 4
$7

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Helen Drutt Gallery, its artists and friends mourn the loss of Tony Papp

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New York, New York

Gijs Bakker

November 1-30, 1991

Waterman Brooch, 1991
Photo: Bruce Weber
77 diamonds, white gold

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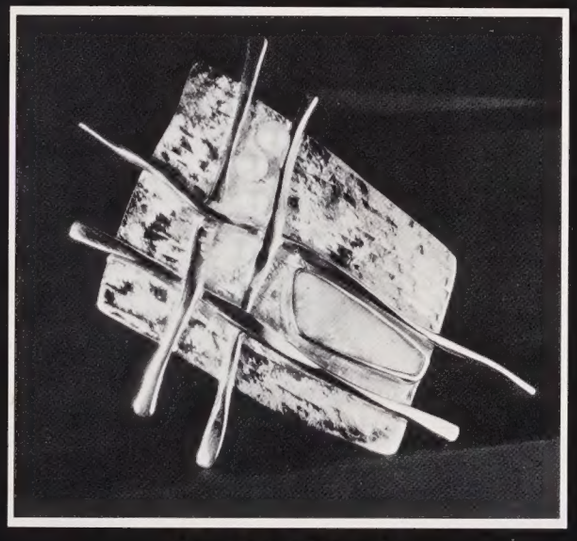

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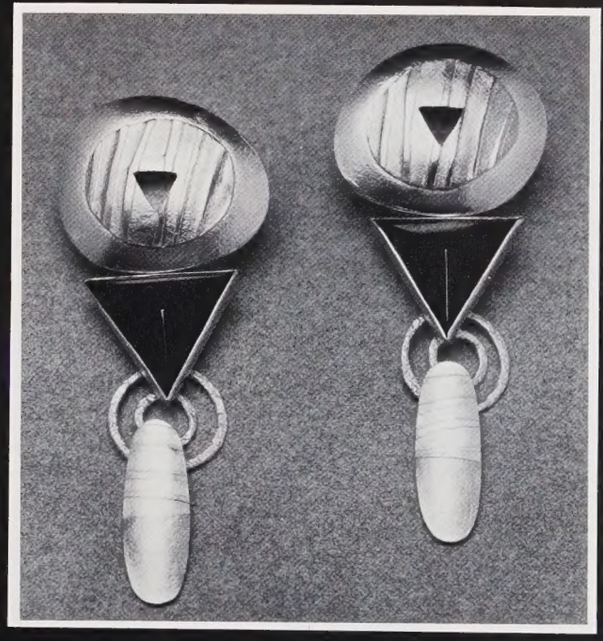

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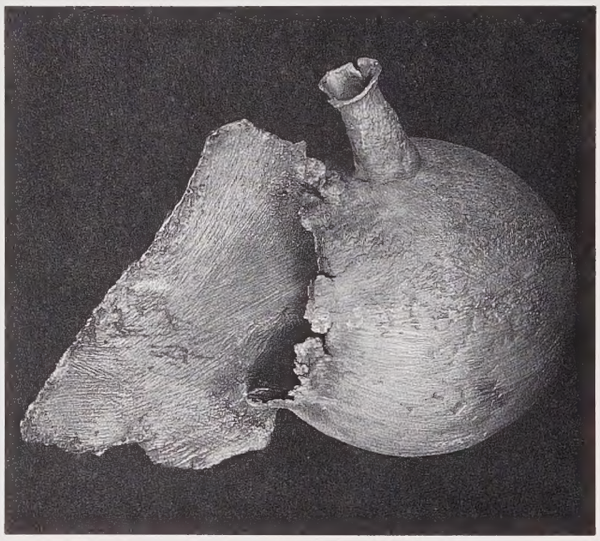

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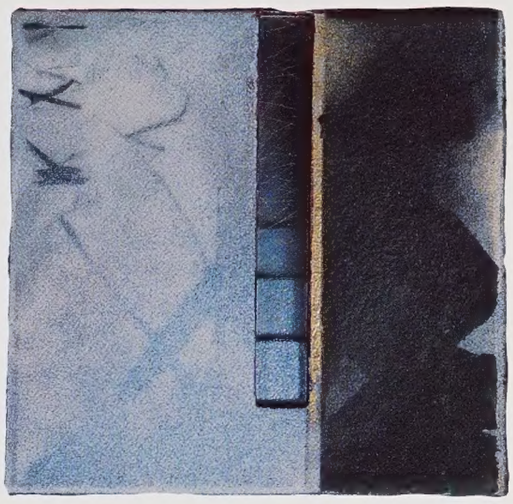
Metalsmith

Fall 1991

Volume 11 Number 4



Rebekah Laskin, *Brooch*
enamel on copper, plexiglas, 2⅜ x 2⅜ x ¼"
See page 26

Departments

Editorial 4

Letters 8

In Memorium
Earl Pardon 6
Adda Husted-Andersen 10

Art & Technics 12
by Curtis K. LaFollette

Cover
Thomas Gentille, *Armlet*, eggshell inlay
Collection: Leonore Jaffe. Photo: Jack Ramsdale
See page 14

Features

Thomas Gentille: The Permanence of the Ephemeral 14
by Vanessa S. Lynn

Glenda Arentzen's Jewelry: Records of Life's Adventures 21
by Patricia Malarcher

Rebekah Laskin: Finding a Voice within the Material 26
by Nancy Boxenbaum

The Great Pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila
A Work of the Certomlyk Master and His Studio 30
by Wolf Rudolph

Reflections & Remedies
A Continuing Dialogue on the State of Metalsmithing and Jewelry 36
by Donald Friedlich and Judith Mitchell

Reviews

Jan Brooks Loyd: Material Culture 41
by David Butler

The Medium is Metal
The Focus is Resources 42
by Susan Wakefield

Carolyn Morris Bach 43
by Carolyn Novin

Cathryn Vandenbrink 44
by Dawn Nakanishi

Steven Brixner 45
by Janice Keaffaber

Bruno Martinazzi 46
by Michael Dunas

David La Plantz 47
by Kris Patzlaff

Historical Sources, New Visions
in Contemporary Metalsmithing 48
by Ron Netsky

The Society of North American
Goldsmith's Annual Conference 49
by Keith A. Lewis

Editorial

American society's problems with intimacy have become the stuff of talk radio and daytime TV. What with the two-parent working family, seven-day work week, and accompanying stress and alienation, the problem between humans is openly acknowledged. If we are having so much trouble being intimate with each other, how must we be approaching our relationship with so-called intimate objects?

This question is of concern to metalsmiths, particularly jewelers, who profess to make what are commonly held to be some of the most intimate objects. But what does intimate mean when applied to objects and is it automatically the province of jewelry? What are the properties that conspire to make an object intimate?

One of the first that comes to mind is size, the scale of an object next to the human body. Gap clothing has recently run a series of print ads that attempts to illustrate this perception. The text reads: "It's a confidence that comes of choice, that comes of startling the world with what is intimate and miniscule yet always elegant in implication. Classic Gap, for those who alter what's expected." The model for one particular ad is Robert Rauschenberg, who, in a gesture to illustrate the text on the opposite page, stretches out his hand to reveal the contents of his pocket – obviously his breast pocket in the Gap denim jacket he is wearing – the intimate pocket, close to the heart. Cupped in his hand are a 20-dollar gold piece, a Lincoln penny, four small rocks and a tiny heart-shaped chunk of cast metal, decorated with a number of squiggly raised lines.

However compelling this ad may be, in fact, by definition, intimate does not mean small. Lots of small things come to mind, such as pet rocks or Barbie dolls, that are not so much intimate as they are cute. So, even though jewelry is often small in contrast to the body, its size alone does not necessarily make it intimate.

More important is both the familiarity and the obviously deeply personal nature of these objects. The fact that they are carried in the pocket automatically supplies them with a private narrative, a story that has connections to innermost thoughts or feelings. Intimate, meaning close as in friendship, has been applied primarily to people but is often transferred to things, things that are close to the body not so much in a physical as a metaphysical sense. That the things in Rauschenberg's hand are in a grouping rather than a single object also heightens the feeling of intimacy. Not only does the proximity of the objects suggest a relationship to him personally but the grouping creates a close connection or union that makes them intimate with each other. One begins to look for a connection among the pieces that might reveal their essence, a clue to their meaning through comparison, to the story behind their possession. The raised texture on each object becomes a focus, the shiny surface, the regular irregularity of a weather-worn stone contrasted to a coin continually rubbed by warm fingers. The fact that they are small allows this group to be held in the palm of the hand, but it is not the driving force in their connotations of intimacy.

The compelling interest created by closeness, the collecting and harboring of these fragments of meaning dictates how intimate an object will appear to be. It is this quality that the Gap ad plays on and hopes to transfer to the product, not clothing as "intimate apparel," whose meaning has now been contorted to "sexy," but apparel that reflects some profound element of the character of the person who chooses to wear it.

The problem posed by this ad parallels the jeweler's problem in facing what it means to make an intimate object. Jewelry has always been perceived as intimate, versus, say, the monumentality of sculpture. Yet, taking the designation for granted has distracted jewelers from the challenge. Questions arise such as: Is the object itself able to carry the connotation of intimacy or will it always just symbolize that relationship with another person? Does the wearer's choice confirm an object's intimate nature or is the object itself intrinsically an intimate entity? Is intimacy only revealed when contrasted with its opposite? Is the perception of the intimate private or universal?

— SB

Metalsmith

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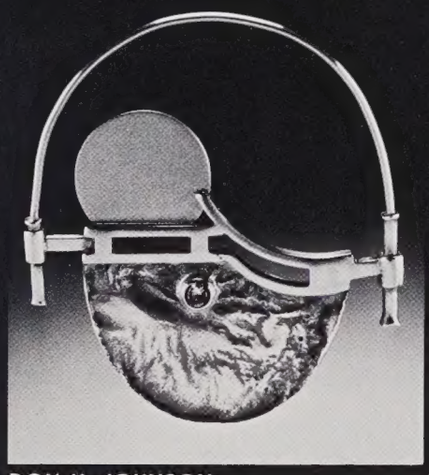

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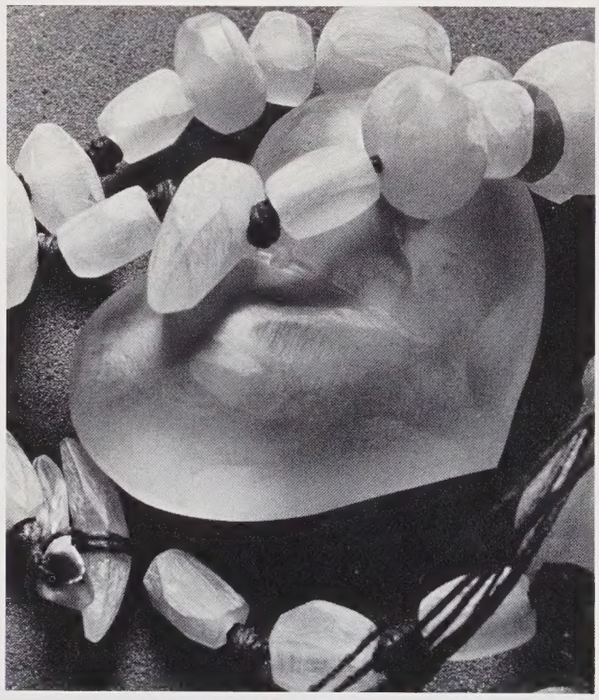

CARA CRONINGER, NECKPIECE; CAST POLYESTER RESIN

SCULPTURE TO WEAR

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Earl Pardon 1926 - 1991

Brooch, sterling silver, 14k and 24k gold, painted enamels, ruby, blue topaz, amethyst; *Bracelet*, sterling silver, 14k and 24k gold, painted enamels, stones, peridots, rubies, blue topaz, amethysts, rhodolites; *Earrings*, sterling silver, 14k and 24k gold, painted enamels, rubies
Photo: Deloye Burrell

Earl Pardon, painter, sculptor and master metalsmith, died on May 1, 1991 at the age of 64. His artistic career spanned five decades; his creative energy seemed endless. As an artist and educator, a pioneer and major figure in the American studio art jewelry movement, Pardon's influence will be felt for decades.

Earl was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on September 6, 1926. He was trained as a painter, receiving his BFA from the Memphis Academy of Art in 1951 and his MFA from Syracuse University in 1959. He was Professor of Art at Skidmore College from 1951 until his retirement in 1989, serving as chairman of the art department from 1968 through 1977. His resume lists may exhibitions, awards and accolades. Beginning with the American Craft Council's "Young Americans" exhibition award in metal in 1952, his career includes such diverse honors as win-ning the design competition for a sculptural screen installed in the corporate headquarters of the Prudential Insurance Company in 1960; inclusion in *Art in America*'s "New Talent" issue in the spring of 1960; acquisition of two works by the Metropolitan Museum in 1979; a retrospective exhibition at Skidmore College in 1980, consisting of 70 paintings and drawings, 20 sculptures and 219 pieces of jewelry, representing 30 years of creativity; and a commission to create a Presidential Chain and Medallion for Skidmore College in 1987. A final tribute came three days before his death when the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution acquired the necklace that appeared on the cover of the Winter 1990 issue of *Metalsmith*.

Earl Pardon's life was about art and creativity. He loved to experiment, to explore new ideas, new techniques and new materials. He painted; he drew; he designed for Towle silversmiths; he sculpted in metal and wood; he created jewelry, or "portable art," as he called it; he designed and built furniture for his house; he created and nurtured a wonderful garden between his home and his studio. The diversity of media, function and scale in which he worked demonstrate Pardon's wide range of interests. His decision to concentrate on jewelry during the last 10 years of his life came from his view of the medium's endless opportunities for visual exploration. He could work on several pieces and ideas at the same time.

Earl had no formal training in the tradition of jewelry making. He created with the eye of a painter, using traditional materials in nontraditional ways. "If it can be cut and polished, I have probably used it in my work," he once said to me. He incorporated ebony and other exotic woods, ivory, rocks and stones, shell and enamels in various combinations with silver and gold. He had to master a myriad of techniques to accomplish the pieces he envisioned. Silver was his primary material: its lower cost made it readily accessible for his continuing explorations and its properties gave him greater design flexibility.

Jewelry to Pardon was about creativity and not about preciousness. He used gemstones purely for color, sometimes hiding them on the back of a brooch or pendant as a secret shared between artist and wearer. In designing his work, he never forgot about the wearer, who is the ultimate showcase for his art jewelry. The scale and weight of the pieces are appropriate for the human figure; the clasps and other fasteners are user-friendly. His jewelry complements the body rather than overpowering it. His pieces are truly "wearable" art.

Earl Pardon was a modest man. He did not seek the limelight, preferring to be in his studio creating or at the college teaching. Retirement for him was an opportunity to have unlimited time in his studio and he relished it. His last two years were a time of continued experimentation and innovation where technical breakthroughs enabled him to create what he called "painted enamels." He bubbled with enthusiasm when he told me about his new enameling technique and what it would allow him to do. At the same time, he confided that if he had never sold anything, he would still be making art because it gave him so much pleasure. The excitement he felt when creating is evident in his work: his jewelry retained freshness, vitality and originality.

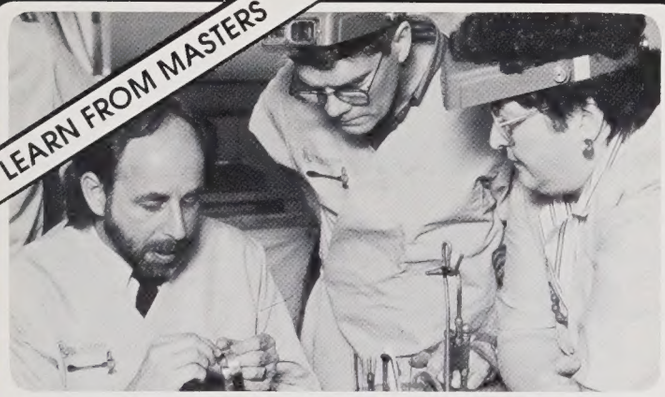
An unselfish man, he touted the work of other artists and took great delight in the success of former students. A number of years ago, he began quietly suggesting that we carry the work of other metalsmiths. The result of his prodding was our "National Jewelry Invitational Exhibitions" of 1989 and 1990, which he curated. His selection of artists for these shows included both recognized masters and emerging talent.

Knowing Earl Pardon and working with him has been one of the highlights of my life. It has been exciting to see the evolution of his work and to watch the response to it grow. Many people who have purchased one piece come back for others. When Earl attended the opening of his solo exhibition in Atlanta in 1988, he was both surprised and delighted to find that many of the patrons arrived adorned in his jewelry. He took me aside and confessed that he had never before seen so many people wearing his work.

Time spent with Earl and his family was memorable. His visits to Atlanta always included talk of art and politics over barbecue and Brunswick stew, fried catfish and hushpuppies, or grits and biscuits. Good food, family and friends were an integral part of Earl's life.

Earl Pardon was an important artist and a very special man. I am thankful that his spirit will live on in the work he left behind; I think of him every day when I look at the wedding band he created for me as a surprise anniversary gift to replace the "temporary" one I had worn for 10 years, or whenever I put on one of the several rings, brooches and necklaces I am fortunate enough to own. I am grateful that I was able to share in his life and could count him as a friend.

Martha Connell
Director and Owner, Connell Gallery / Great American Gallery, Atlanta



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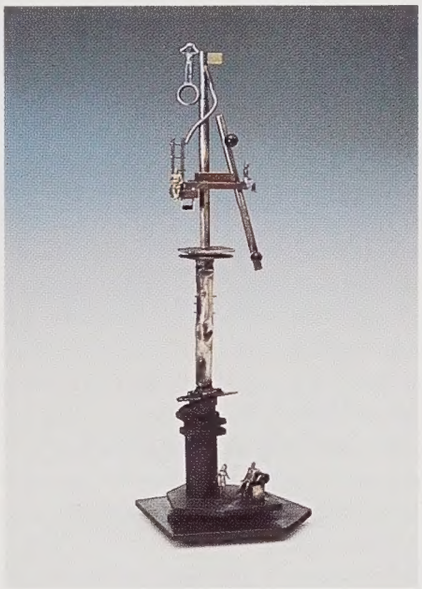

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SCULPTURE WITH PIN
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MALCOLM OWEN

"SERVANT"
LIFE SIZE DETAIL

Letters

Dear Editor:

Earl Pardon was an intense yet effervescent man. His passion for his craft superseded all else (except golf). Earl was very fortunate. Being a jeweler of the 50s, he entered the field with opportunities abounding. Yet, he never thought about the business side of making art; he just wanted to concentrate on his craft. As a result, recognition came naturally. In fact, it's ironic what a commercial success Earl became, since he exerted so little effort or concern in that regard. He didn't quite relate to the concept of struggling in the job market. The important thing, he would say, was never to stop working. He used to tell me, "The day you stop making work is the day you die." I try to remember that statement whenever tasks mount, productivity slows and moodiness heightens – it has always provided just the right perspective.

Earl worked with a quiet intensity, and he was incredibly prolific. But beyond his craft, there was also a passion for life itself. Surprisingly, though, Earl could come across as the most laid-back guy you ever met. As a teacher, he would never preach or make demands. Each student was expected to choose her own goals. If you didn't want to come to class, that was fine, no guilt-trip would follow.

Earl loved to "kibbitz" with students, to tell stories about his days in the South. He'd talk about "cutting the rug" at parties in old mansions and spin yarns about the Old South. And he could always go for some good "barbeque" (if it was authentic).

He never talked about his latest accomplishments, or about anyone's accomplishments in the field of metals. This topic never came up. I never even knew that SNAG or *Metalsmith* existed until I graduated college. Earl was not concerned with getting "involved" in organizations; this would take away from his real concern, his work. As a teacher (not a kibbitzer), he was a man of few words. He would leave students to their own self-discovery. He would encourage, if a student sought encouragement. You could show him what you were up to, but you didn't have to. If you had a design for a project and he knew it would never work, he'd tell you so, but he'd let you try it anyway. I remember one such instance. When I showed him the finished piece, he was surprised that I had gotten my design to work. He just chuckled. Somehow, though, he communicated what made a good piece of jewelry. It lay in the surprise element. This was a consistent source of exploration for him.

Earl continued as a friend after my years at Skidmore College (I graduated in 1985). He was always there when I needed advice. In a short telephone conversation, he could always instill in me the drive and desire to continue the struggle and dream of creating. It's to his credit how many fine jewelers who began their careers at Skidmore under his direction have become well-known. I don't think it was anything he did or said; I think it was the example he set.

Lisa Bernfield Ben-Zeev, Chicago, IL

Dear Editor:

I was pleased to see Jane Addams Allen's critical essay, (on Bill Harper, Winter 91) and wish it could make it into an art magazine. Having mentioned that the crafts were now equal in importance to the so-called fine arts, both of which are more vibrant, diverse, exciting and responsible than at any other time in the 20th century.

Margret Craver Withers, Boston, MA

Dear Editor:

I just wanted to let you know how impressed I was with the last two issues of *Metalsmith* (Fall and Winter) – the enamel articles have been wonderful! You told me last spring when I was getting some reprint information that you were going to be doing more with enamel. I'm very excited and pleased. At our Enamel Guild: West meeting we all discussed the enamel articles in *Metalsmith.* The magazine just gets better with every issue. Thank you.

Kyle Pearson, President, Enamel Guild West, Levcadia, CA

Dear Editor:

Metalsmith is a strong publication that succeeds in bringing the wider world of art/metalsmithing to my door. I am grateful for your fine work as editor and rarely have any criticism of the resulting publication. But the cover photograph of the Spring issue neither informs me (about Ted Muehling's work) nor conveys the sensuality described in the article by Vanessa S. Lynn. It is simply blurred and confusing. It is always exciting to see strong photographs of strong metalsmithing design. Blurred, confusing photographs seem to be a poor way to bring our work to each other and a terrible way to bring our work to the wider audience we seek. By contrast, the photograph on page 20 conveys the softly sensual mood of Muehling's work as described by the author *and* maintains enough focus to inform the viewer of its design.

Jeanne Sturdevant, Greenville, TX

Dear Editor:

I have been routinely amazed by most of what Vanessa Lynn writes and by *Metalsmith* and our Editorial Board for allowing it. Her contrived attempt at artful analysis boils down to little more that head-in-the-clouds art-jargon gibberish. The reader is seldom offered any insight regarding the personal side of the maker or his or her own thoughts relative to those things he or she makes. We are always left with Vanessa's predictable style. In the Spring 91 issue we were faced with her vague, contrived analysis and out-of-focus photographs of the works to compound the situation. I believe Mr. Muehling and the readers of *Metalsmith* deserve clear words and photographs.

Chuck Evans, Ames, IA

Vanessa Lynn responds:

Chuck Evans is quite right when he says I seldom offer "any insight regarding the personal side of the maker or his or her own thoughts relative to those things he or she makes." In fact, I go to great lengths not to do that. There are several reasons why.

To me, that is the task of a journalist. Such information is simply a matter of asking stock questions and receiving information, and is probably best presented to an audience in an interview format. In preparation for my articles, I certainly ask such questions, but the answers become not the end, but merely a departure point for my own exploratory thinking.

My task, as I see it, is one of analysis. I refrain from using the word critic, because it is too loaded. What I try to do is absorb information, from the artist, and *from the work.* I process that with all the other things that my particular training and orientation give me access to, including the larger worlds of jewelry, fine art, the other arts and a host of social and political viewpoints. *(Continued on page 50)*

Philip David
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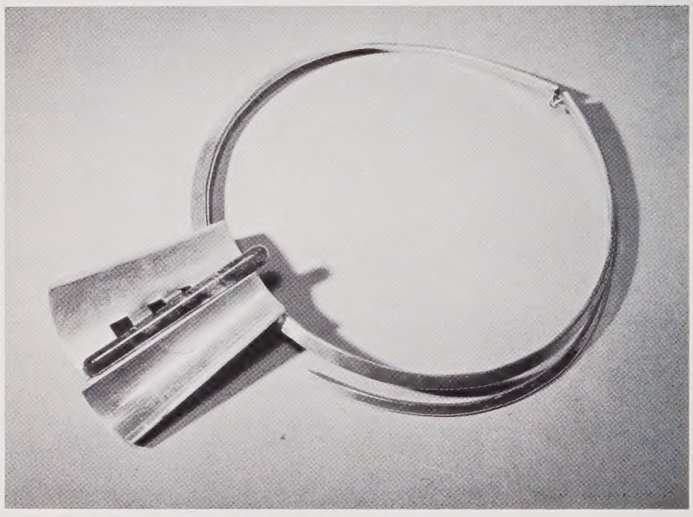
Adda Husted-Andersen c. 1900 - 1990

Salt and Pepper, enameled, 1950 – 1960



Necklace, silver, moss agate, 1950s

On September 13, 1990, Adda Husted-Andersen, familiarly known as Andy, died in Copenhagen, Denmark, her native land. She was a very special lady with a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

After training in Denmark as a metalsmith, and studying at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Pforzheim, Germany for one year in 1927, Andy gained expertise by working with international craftsmen and designers in several European countries, including Jean Dunand in Paris. Around 1930, she arrived in New York City where she worked for Georg Jensen, fabricating jewelry and enamelware in her apartment. For the next 30 years, Andy operated an active business, opening her own shop in New York in 1944, which produced a wide selection of chased and enameled objects, holloware, flatware and jewelry. She won awards and exhibited her work throughout the United States and Europe. She helped organize the New York Society of Craftsmen (which became Artist-Craftsmen of New York around 1948), of which she was president from 1941 – 44; established a distinctive silversmithing/enameling program at the Craft Students League beginning around 1933; was a member of the editorial board of *Craft Horizons;* and, in 1975, become a fellow of the American Craft Council.

I came to know Andy in 1970. Having recently received an MFA degree in jewelry design and metalsmithing from Indiana University, I wanted some professional benchwork experience and began working at her shop located on First Avenue, a few blocks north of the United Nations. Whereas in former days Andy had employed as many as five full-time apprentices, she now needed only one. She was planning to return to Denmark to "retire" in a few years and had started to close down some of her accounts. Still, at busy times like Christmas and when large orders were due, other craftsmen were called upon to help.

Early each morning I would open up the shop, and upon Andy's arrival, we would plan the day. She taught at the Craft Students League, so I would often be left alone to work on commissions, design and manufacture new stock items, take orders, set up the storefront display windows and so on. Andy had a variety of fascinating customers. So me were long-time clients who came regularly to order unique and beautiful items. Others with limited budgets still wanted to purchase small and precious gifts. She made metal models for aspiring fashion industry designers, repaired and reenameled ancient Egyptian artifacts for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and designed and fabricated presentation pieces for many human-rights organizations, including the NAACP. She opened up her shop to two acoustical engineers from Yale to record the sounds of hand planishing, sawing, filing, raising and polishing. This recording became the background accompaniment to a special exhibit, "American Arts at Yale 1651-1971: Selections from University Collections." Rarely was anyone turned away.

Andy taught me to do my best in the execution of every piece, to be open and discover the wonders of the creative process, to be flexible and take risks, to turn my mistakes into learning, to look for and create opportunities that would both expand my technical skills and knowledge as a craftsman and deepen me as a person and, most of all, to "have faith."

After I had worked with Andy for a year-and-a-half, she felt it was important for me to experience a jewelry business in full operation and encouraged me to apply for a work/study grant to Denmark for 1972-73. As part of my winning such a scholarship, she tried to teach me Danish. Although lunchtime was "sacred" – to be quiet and read or to work over a foreign crossword puzzle, Andy would correct my short written assignments and insist that we converse in simple Danish, practicing key workshop phrases like, "What gauge sterling should I use?" or "Where is the wooden mallet?" or "Please pass the file."

Each Christmas Andy threw a party in the workshop. The front door was bolted and business postponed for the day. Fine linen and china were brought out, special food was prepared. Presents, songs, poems and lots of laughter were shared.

In the mid 1970s, Andy did finally retire and return to Denmark to be with her devoted family and friends. She returned to New York several times to visit. By now she was aging gracefully, yet with each trip she found it a bit more difficult to navigate. When it became too much, she graciously welcomed visitors into her home in Copenhagen. Andy continued to be engaged in her metalwork as long as her health allowed. She was an accomplished artist, an inspiring teacher and a dear friend.

Melinda M. Bridgman is an independent metalsmith living and working in South Woodstock, Connecticut and Toronto, Canada.

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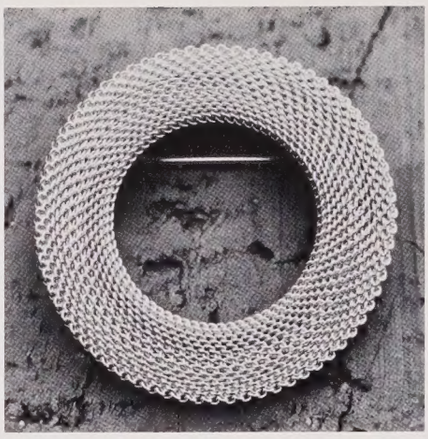


Olle Johanson
Brooch
goldwashed brass
4mm x 38mm d.
1991

by Curtis K. LaFollette

Providence is where industry makes jewelry; it's that city's principal activity. An appraisal of the *Yellow Pages* is instructive. The entries seem endless, although in actuality there are only 18 pages dedicated to some aspect of this endeavor. There are equipment suppliers, services, job shops, jobbers, casters, stonesetters, modelmakers, refiners, packaging manufacturers, display card manufacturers, etc. Virtually any connection, no matter how remote, is exercised to get a company's name listed somewhere in the jewelry section. Still, for all this diversity in manufacturing, promotion, marketing and service, the product – whether low end or high – represents the lowest common denominator of banality. It's not that there isn't the potential for good stuff. A vast array of mass-produced elements are catalogued and readily available. This includes components, subassemblies, findings and chains, many of which originated before the end of the 19th century and remain either in stock or even in production. There are other items – still in production – that trace their origin from every period of art, or, more importantly, taste, in the 20th century. It's true that there are many fewer companies in business now than at any other time since the beginning of the industrial revolution, which produced the Providence jewelry industry. Many of the actual production facilities and machines remain in the service of the subsidiaries or larger concerns and corporations we know today. There are castings, stampings, screw machine products, swedgings, milling machine products, rings, chains, meshes, money clips, charms, findings, ornaments, decorated wires and roller-printed sheet stock, available off-the-shelf or in limited-production runs in copper, brass, nickel-silver, sterling silver, stainless steel, karat gold and even plastic, to say nothing of gold-filled stock and anodized aluminum. There are also in-numerable sample makers – those people who rummage through all this material in an attempt to synthesize finished pieces of "jewelry" for niche markets as well as mass distribution. Unfortunately, the great majority of these people, or the companies they work for, have little or no interest in any aspect of their product, other than their profit margin, even if the sample makers are esthetically competent.

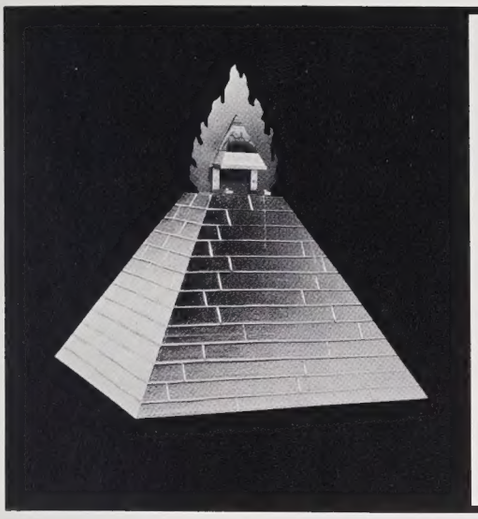
An exception to this dismal morass can be found in the work of Olle Johanson. Olle first studied in Sweden and more recently earned an MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design. While this education would suggest a career in goldsmithing, he has not been content to operate exclusively in that rarefied atmosphere. His *Weltanschauung* incorporates an intellectual structure of systematic values, a capacity for abstraction, objective analysis and commitment to the total sensory quality of his work, His jewelry respects the need for the expression of haptic, auditory and optic integration as a condition necessary for the work's vitality and validity. Olle evaluates the experience of his pieces as a personal and social statement without regard to the trivial dictates of style or the confines of ideological rhetoric. He insists through his work that within the wealth of industrial production one needs only to recognize those elements and components, which, through synthesis with his intuition and the conceptual base of his intellectual reinterpretation and manipulation, transcend the banality of their origin.

An integral part of this interaction is his concern for the social implications of his work. As a result of the incorporation of mass production and base metal, Olle is able to produce classless, broadly accessible objects, which, while they are not intended for the detached reverential atmosphere of a display case in a museum, are priced competitively with fashion jewelry. They function as objects of personal detail that are not bound to the transitory nature of fashion. The wearer can enjoy the object both as an intimate esthetic experience and as a piece of jewelry that will survive the market-powered shifts in style that doom ordinary accessories and articles of apparel to obsolescence and abandonment.

Among the most interesting pieces in his line of jewelry is a circular mesh brooch in the form of a washer. It is produced by forming a double ring – figure eight in cross section – of seamless knitted 87–13 brass mesh with a foot press. The flattened piece retains some of its flexibility, although it has been work-hardened. The surface has been brightened by this operation, even as the individual strands of wire are partially swedged to form a series of tiny ovaloid flats, which emerge from the surface as round wire moving into the core of the object. The mesh has also opened slightly as it has been flattened, rendering it sievelike, so that one can just see through it. Pinbacks and an elliptical trademark are silver-soldered on the reverse side. The washer is polished, heavily nickel-plated and finally gold-plated to a thickness of 50 mills. This is the same thickness as the plating on a Cadillac hood ornament, which is intended to last 50 years. Cadillac hood ornaments are plated at the same facility as these disc brooches. When handled and examined, this jewelry reveals a richly textured smooth surface, reminiscent of the pleasant silken coolness of a snake passing through the fingers. This is a private experience that exists only in real time. Remembered, it is a verbal and intellectual abstraction. When the piece is flexed, it produces an audible crunch, both auditory and haptic. This results from the physical characteristics of the heavy nickel plate, which is applied as a preparatory base for the 50-mill gold plate, because gold does not adhere properly to brass. The experience is also both time-specific and transitory.

These washers are intended to be worn. It is only then that they fulfill their destiny as visual detail. And it is only then that they assert their identity, but it is not an authoritarian projection of the designer's ego or a surrogate personality for the wearer. It is, in fact, the legitimate operation of an intimate object to integrate a daily social and personal esthetic experience.

Curtis K. LaFollette is a professor of art at Rhode Island College in Providence.



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Thomas Gentille

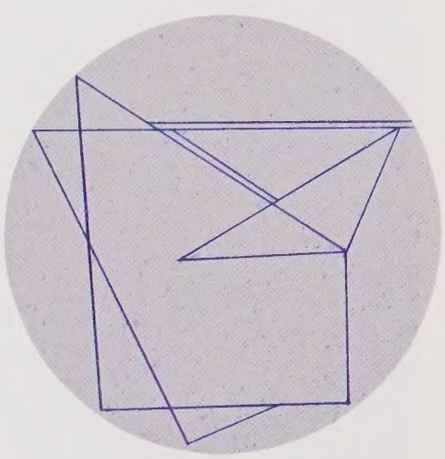
The Permanence of the Ephemeral

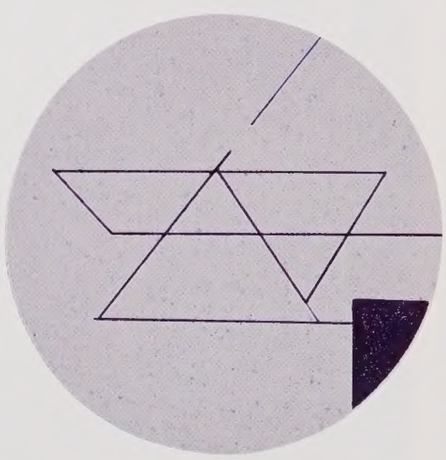
by Vanessa S. Lynn

Although Thomas Gentille has the distinction of having a black ceramic glaze named for him, it is his little-known recovery of an ancient eggshell surface for jewelry that marks for him an emblematic achievement. Eggshell, the skin of the egg, the universal symbol of potentiality, captures all that Gentille seeks. Medieval man thought of the egg as container of both matter and thought. So it must be for Gentille, who desires a monument to that most fleeting of potentialities, creativity. The inherent worthlessness of the material, the strain of the detailed technique and the surface dematerialization build to a crescendo as his lifelong concerns. To take the most fragile and ephemeral of natural materials and restructure it, resurrect it, in a permanent form of his own creation is the essence of what he seeks to achieve as an artist.

The time-consuming process involves thousands of eggshell fragments painstakingly laid and permanently affixed to a hand-carved armature. The material is emphasized through his control of the scale of these calcified chips and by the surface application of one or more pigments. The colors lodge only between the myriad slivers of shell, emphasizing the irregular geometry that is the patchwork surface.

Six years to research and three years to complete the first eggshell armlet: it is understandable that Gentille is reluctant to share his technique. Yet, because the eggshell surface is the essence of so much that is his, it is doubtful that anyone could use it as effectively. For over 30 years, Thomas Gentille has occupied a small and diminishing corner of the artist/jeweler community. Although, like many peers, his work is truly his *raison d'etre*, he, in contrast, must often be coaxed to bring pieces out of seclusion for viewing. Instead of opportunistic self-promotion and grandstanding, he has been known to keep his work out of potentially profitable venues and discourage sales to people whom he feels misunderstand his intention. His work celebrates technique yet avoids flashy, trendy pyrotechnics. He could spend six years researching a process; he has spent 10 on the completion of a single necklace. In the past, his path has sometimes paralleled and sometimes diverged from that of mainstream jewelry developments. But more often, in his isolation, he seems to have been several steps ahead. The result is a focused, exacting oeuvre, combining a modernist sensibility with old-world craftsmanship that seems at times in opposition to prevailing art world practice.





***Pins*, Surel, ultramarine blue pure pigment inlays with metallic particles, 8.6mm d.**
Photos: Karen Bell

***Pin*, wood burl, eggshell inlay, 11.5 x 6.9 x 2.3mm deep.**
Photo: Karen Bell

***Pin*, 18k gold, pearls, approx. 5.5mm d.**

His life fits the art world stereotype of the practicing, passionate maker. His cramped urban flat, piled with a lifetime of paraphernalia, serves as living and working environment. Here he keeps his needs to a minimum, concentrating on the vision, the work. Eliminating peripheral distractions permits a disciplined life devoted to a slow, steady investigation of the things that make him passionate: geometry, tonality and materiality.

These preoccupations, so apparent in his mature work, seem well defined by an early date. From the outset, he preferred a two-dimensional format. This provided the most receptive plane for him to explore issues of nonobjectivity. He respects the inherent beauty and clarity of pure form and employs it in his austere compositions. He uses geometry to explore issues of perception, reality and illusion. Similarly, he revels in color for its own sake and for the evocative power released through juxtaposition. He favors two extremes of palette: primary, unmodulated tonalities and light-refracting, shimmering hues that dematerialize in the viewing. In the service of each of these concerns, Gentille lavishes attention to detail.

The latter is not a skilled craftsman's indulgence but part of a philosophical framework. At the core is his pursuit of permanence, his need to make only what will endure. This need prods him to seek both a physical and esthetic immortality. It underlies the structural systems that become solutions for the conservation of ephemeral materials. The cold-connection acrylic sandwich, to take but one example, serves as protector to the host of delicate materials, gold leaf, feathers, glitter or hand-dyed silk. Gentille will not incorporate them until he is confident they will not disintegrate in time.

The desire for permanence not only underlies his attraction to innovative materials, it offers another explanation for his attraction to geometry. Geometry provides a language that is both universally understood and transcendent of its time and place. The issues of geometric abstraction can only be pinpointed to the 20th century. Using it allows him to keep company with the artists to whom he is most responsive, from Mondrian to Halley. But geometry provides an advantage beyond timelessness. It offers the opportunity to wed the exploration of the above issues to the investigation of the even larger motivating passion.

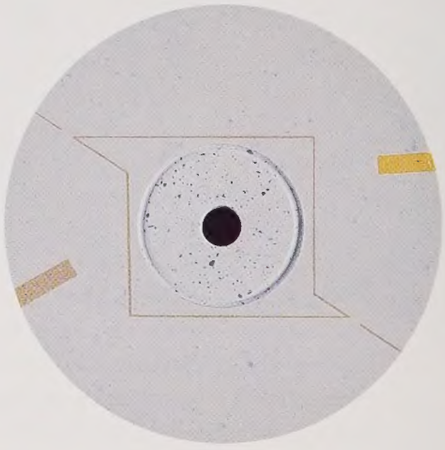
Gentille is maniacal about material. He has made his task as an artist to identify, enhance and release a material's integrity. His quest has not been for "the elevation of the inexpensive," although he has been conveniently categorized in the "alternative material" camp. His search pre-dates the precious metal market frenzy of the 70s. In 1958, his last year as an undergraduate at the Cleveland Institute of Art, he chose to conclude his three years of training as a painter/sculptor by a year of jewelry study with John Paul Miller. He was, henceforth, a painter/sculptor pursuing fine art goals with unconventional materials. He gained notoriety by using ebony to carve a brooch; its application in metal studios was heretofore reserved for holloware handles. He was the first student at Cleveland to do a bronze casting in jewelry. And, true to his passion for exploring new materials, he took the initiative that resulted in the establishment of the first glass-blowing facility at the school.

Gentille's early work incorporates a variety of precious materials, which even then were used in unconventional ways. He laid silk into carved ebony channels, inlaid dental amalgam into a domed gold pin, and granulated 24k gold for hairpick embellishments before anyone told him it was technically impossible. He used feathers in acrylic inlays, and invented a wax on wax casting technique, which Oppi Untracht asked him to detail for *Jewelry: Concepts and Technology*. Always, as when he cemented tiny pearls in pockets and made raised walls of gold for their protection, the design and technique are intertwined in the service of permanence. He invented a pure-pigment inlay technique that is now taught in high schools internationally. The pleasure and passion of this pursuit, of not only knowing and conquering a method or material, but then actually inventing one's own, drives him to be experimental. At the same time, he has ultimately shared many of his discoveries, and in the process lost credit for initiating them. This is because he has been negligent in documenting his work, remiss in photographing, dating and recording his own sales and exhibitions. It remains for the next researcher to confirm that his long love affair with acrylic sheet developed independent of the published examples coming from Europe in the early 70s, but it seems highly likely that such is the case. More important than the chronology of acrylics is his advanced explorations with them. He has learned to maximize the intrinsic properties of acrylic and then alter them to create and control a new set of colors, textures and light-gathering properties. In so doing, he frequently manages to assemble a combination of techniques that defy expectation and render the alien matter with humanist sensibility. Gentille is able to bring a life force to that which we think of as inert.

He is capable of doing this because he is very clear about the driving force behind his continuing investigations. He believes that the less precious the material, the more difficult it is to locate its integrity, its "soul." And therein lies the challenge. "You can bite into 24k gold and create something beautiful." Acrylic, dental amalgam, paper foil, thread and eggshell offer no such easy answers. It may be romantic, yet it may well be this hard-won understanding that underlies Gentille's unique achievements with these materials. It involves extracting essentiality. Too many jewelers chose a material simply because it is there. Their compositional need for a pale, flat passage in an assemblage, for example, may just as easily be fulfilled by gold, plastic, bone or enamel. A found object or material, in other words, may be used simply because it has been found. When at its best, Gentille's use of a particular material insinuates itself within a composition as the only choice and the only manipulation to provide an effective result. Remove *that* material, and the integrity of the entire piece disintegrates. A late armlet (1989) of mother-of-pearl, ebony and Colorcore provides a handsome example. The graphic composition calls to mind Ilya Bolotowsky's *Small White Tondo* of 1960 (Yale University Art Gallery), with its use of close white and off-white tonalities, rhythmically punctuated by black lines and gray planes. Gentille has used the intrinsic grain in the pearlized surface to exceptional advantage, placing each in juxtaposition to its neighbor so that each captures and refracts light independently. Consequently, each becomes a different color; Ad Reinhardt's black canvases also come to mind. This symphony of whites further benefits from the introduction of a truncated, rectangle of matte-gray Colorcore placed at a 45-degree angle to the pearlized rhythms. The density of the synthetic material and the finality of its flatness serve to intensify the visual unpredictability of the organic surface. The narrow ebony divisions also used here share the properties of both; organic by definition, their grain compliments the pearl at the same time that their dense color resonates with the laminate. It is not just the unexpected harmony of the natural/synthetic juxtaposition that makes this work so powerful; it is the artist's ultimate ability to understand each material. Gentille's handling of the mother-of-pearl grain results in a tonal and textural complexity rivaling the power of the brushstroke in the best monochrome painting.

To extract the essence of each material in this way is, in a sense, to reduce it. To strip away the literal and figurative surface distractions is to proclaim the material's purest facticity. The same impetus accounts for Gentille's structural reductivism in his mature work. As his progression with materials went from the precious as primary to irrelevant, he reduced his dimensional vocabulary (by the 70s) to the essence of geometric perfection, the circle. With rare exception, the circular brooch or circular, planar armlet became the essentially flat canvas for all his work. Yet, as he points out, he works his flatness three-dimensionally.

Just as he seeks to get "inside" a material, so too he parallels its construction in his composition. For example, his constructed brooches use their ⅜-inch depth in two ways. First, surface skin is penetrated and something – color, space, light, dark or texture – is revealed within. He creates apertures through which we may peer to find a greater truth. Through that revelation, the entire structure is altered, and so too is our understanding of the piece. The most dramatic illustration of this is a series of 20 round, bronze brooches, each of which had a central square worked upon it. The circular surface of each was treated uniquely, as was the handling of the square. One might be cut out, a second might be inset with ebony, a third could protrude in sandpapered plexiglass. They call to mind a jeweler's homage to Josef Albers's *Homage to the Square.* But Albers's 40-year series explored the calculated interaction of color and straight lines through his square-on-square formula. Gentille expands the experiment by increasing the controlled parameters. By adding variation in material, texture and density to his own square-on-circle equation, he explodes our preconceptions of each material in each juxtaposition as well as our understanding of nonobjective figure/ground relationships.

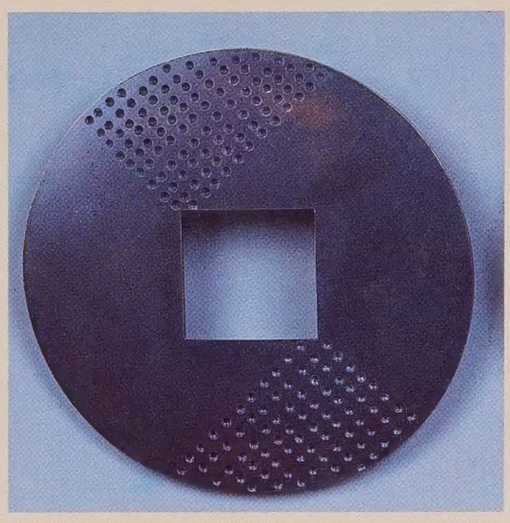


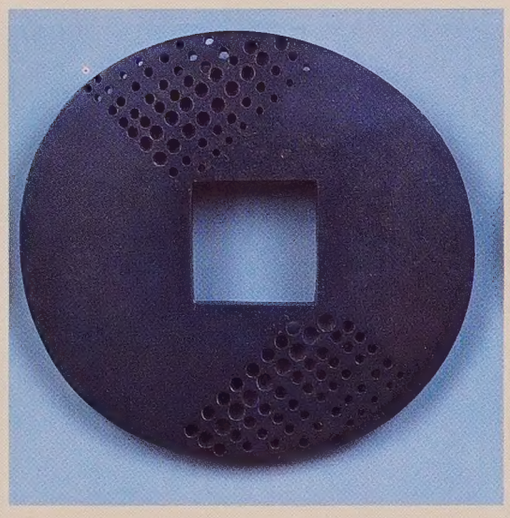
***Pin,* Surel,**
pure pigment inlays,
10.5mm d. x 6mm deep.
Photo: Karen Bell

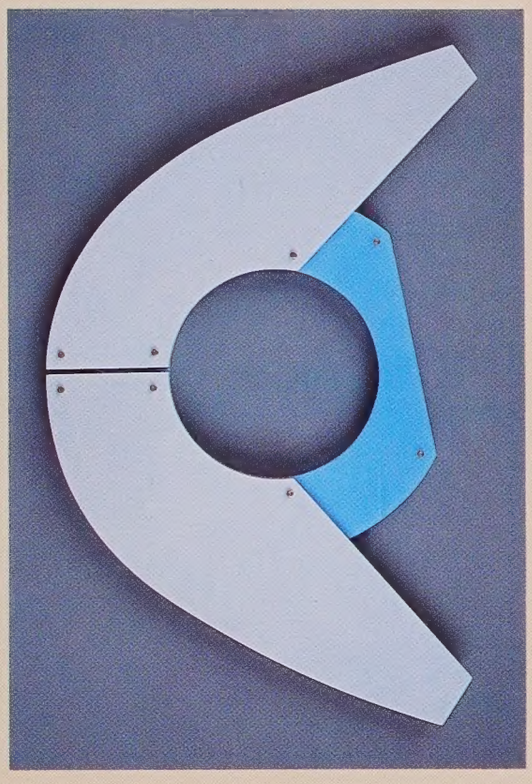
The second way in which the pins and armlets take advantage of depth is the fact that both sides bear complete compositions. In the case of a pin's verso, this is not a romantic secret between artist and patron. Each is a complete composition, including the consideration of the width of the pin stem as it relates to the angle and font of the artist's signature. In the case of a flat armlet, the piece reads as two entirely different compositions, depending on whether the arm is up or down. Like Gentille's obsessive exploration to find the inner truth of a material, and his structural sandwiches whose layers expose formal, textural or tonal secrets, these completely self-sufficient "alternative faces" use the strict vocabulary of geometric abstraction to defy that modernist dictum, "What you see is what you see!" In the case of Gentille, what you see in never all there is.

Vanessa S. Lynn is a writer living in New York who frequently contributes to Metalsmith.

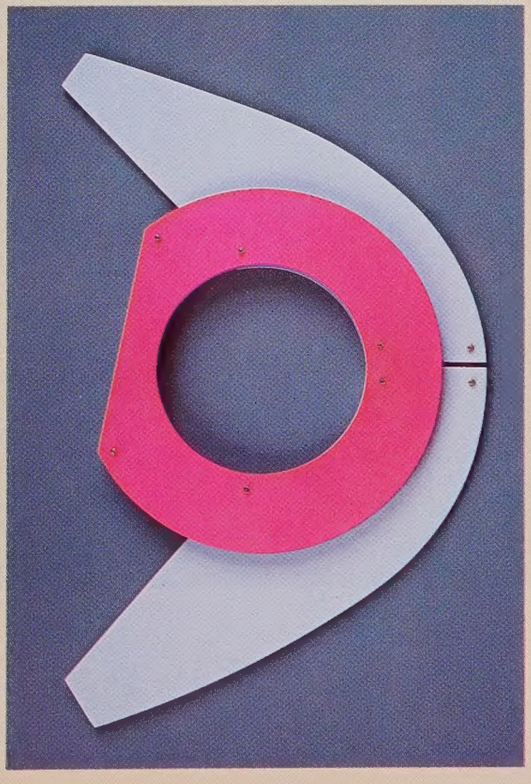
Square in Circle Pins, 3 variations from a series of 20; *top*: bronze, chemical patina; *center*: solid copper, heat and chemical patina; *bottom*: bronze, pink marble cube, chemical and heat patina, each approx. 7.1mm d. Photos: Karen Bell







Armlet, front and back, acrylic, 22.8mm l. Photos: Karen Bell



Glenda Arentzen's Jewelry

RECORDS OF LIFE'S ADVENTURES

BY PATRICIA MALARCHER

■ At mid-career, goldsmith Glenda Arentzen still produces jewelry with the freshness that has been her hallmark for a quarter of a century. It permeates whatever she makes, appearing not only in lively, asymmetrical profiles, but also in details: the crisp edges of a 24k gold earring; the apparently spontaneous shape of a brooch; the loose but precise fit of a textured scrap of gold to its structural support. Arentzen's light but authoritative touch never emphasizes metal as a precious commodity, but rather as a means to illuminate ideas.

In addition to the characteristics above, the work now is tempered with a new ingredient, the artist's seasoned reflections on human life and nature. During the past decade, this enriching content has been mined primarily from Arentzen's experience of living and working in rural New Hampshire.

On many counts, Arentzen typifies the generation of artists in craft mediums, who came of age in the early 1960s. In 1962, the year she received a bachelor's degree in art from Skidmore College, representation in "Young Americans" at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (now the American Craft Museum) launched her exhibition career; a two-year stint as an assistant in Adda Husted-Andersen's New York studio was followed by a Fulbright year in Denmark; after earning a master's degree from Teacher's College of Columbia University, she taught part-time at the Fashion Institute of Technology and other schools to supplement her income from commissions and other sales of work.

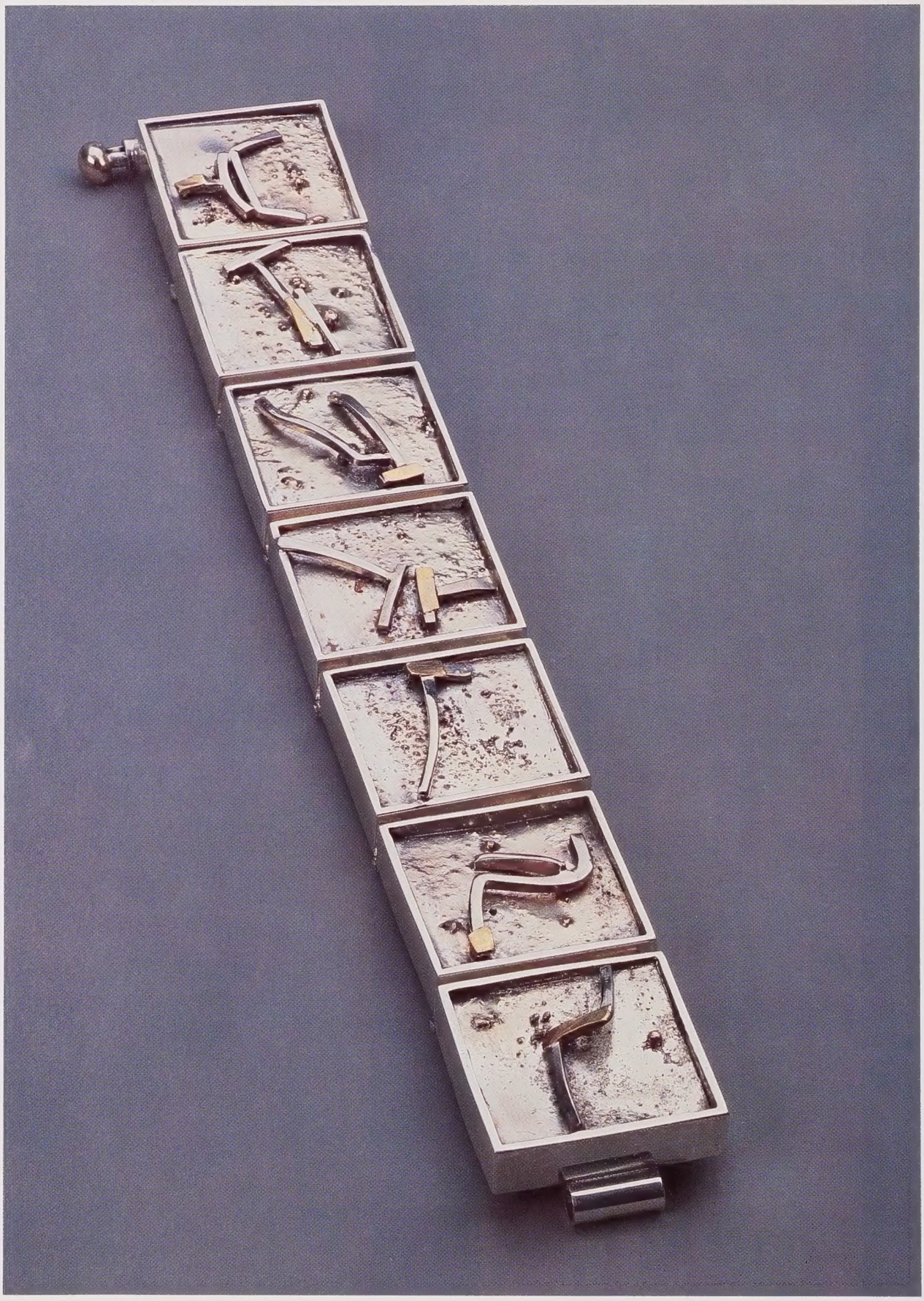
Each step forward was a pioneering venture along paths that, at the time, were only sketchily defined. As the field's horizons have widened, her development of knowledge and skills has kept pace with opportunities, among which is a gift for Queen Elizabeth to present at Ascot, and awards that include three from Diamonds International. Her extensive research into patination and the work that resulted from it introduced a new vocabulary of color in silver and gold.

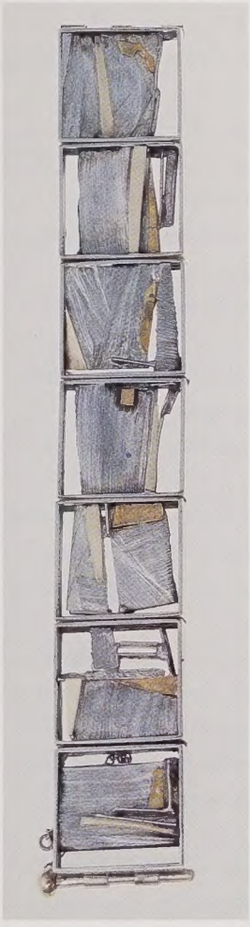
Although some time ago Arentzen reached the professional level where jewelry sales earn her a living, she has managed to retain her pioneering spirit. And, although her career might be read as a blueprint for success as a metalsmith, the zest for life that overflows into her work is a singular, nontransferable trait. She once described object-making as the "visual record of my adventures."

One morning last spring at the Aaron Faber Gallery, Arentzen was interviewed amidst an installation of 75 new works amassed for a solo show. Just emerging from "the frenzy of the final pieces," she seemed still energized by the process of creation.

As she shifted her attention from one object to another, her conversation sparkled with images that have influenced her forms: the patterning of rocks on a hillside; the cracks in a macadam road with something oozing out from beneath; a wet leaf hitting her face in the fall; the downward thrust of a waterfall, echoed in the metal "rain" falling from an earring. She conveyed the impression of an alchemist who had transformed the New England landscape into gold. In particular, a large percentage of the pieces had been inspired by the flow of water. "I seem to have become attuned to my surroundings in motion," she observed. Ironically, it was not beside a brook, but, rather, on the platform of a New York City subway station that she became poignantly aware of this attunement.

Landscape Ring
14k yellow gold, sterling silver
1991





ABOVE
Box Bracelet
14k, 24k yellow gold,
sterling silver,
gemstones, c. 1988

LEFT
Box Bracelet
sterling silver, 14k gold
1988

"I remember the feeling of revelation when, a couple of years ago, a woman, an underground street performer with a microphone, was singing a rap song with a cadence like a flow. It went on for many verses; each had something to do with a civilization, starting with Egypt and going all through history. The chorus was about a river, and had a feminist viewpoint: woman is the river. There was a kind of feeling that connected with what I see in rivers – for instance, when I'm in a plane flying low enough to watch how they flow."

River is the title of the necklace that served as the show's centerpiece. Its flat, textured curves of gold narrow and widen as they separate and join, compelling the eye to trace a circular course. Although it has a raw simplicity, its gentle rise in the center as well as its construction in segments suggest a fluidity intended to accommodate the body. "Some people have the misconception that something can be either art or wearable, that it's impossible to make art jewelry that is also comfortable. With *River*, I wanted to make an art statement, but also wanted it to rest on the shoulders properly, to meet its obligations in terms of concept."

This new work is mostly organic images based on natural forms that hold emotion for Arentzen. Inspired by both micro and macro views of landscape, the pieces are not objective translations, but rather, abstractions reflecting the attempt to get inside ideas, to capture essences that would offer viewers, and particularly those who wear the jewelry, access to fantasy. "I wanted to make comforting, provoking, stimulating, 'places to be' – in many ways they are retreats," she said. "When pieces really work, you feel a passion in them that seems to be getting at some elemental areas of life." Arentzen's notion of her work as "places to be" was expressed in an article in *Craft Horizons* in 1976.[1] Since then, however, her personal frame of reference for "place" has radically changed, and this has affected her ideas.

Although her business is centered in New York, and she still has a New York apartment, 10 years ago she headed for New Hampshire to enter a new phase of life. The object: to merge her life with that of Rick Harkness, a glassblower she had met at the Haystack School when she was learning to blow glass herself. Harkness's country house was equipped with a "wood stove, dirt cellar, cows and step-children." The jolt that accompanied the move was more than that from the simplicity of living alone to the complexity of a household. It also meant disconnecting, for long periods, from the stimulation of urban life and interaction with peers and customers who appreciated the expressive character of her work.

Although New Hampshire is a craft-conscious state, dotted with guild-sponsored shops, Arentzen realized that her artistic orientation veered from the regional norm. "There, I noticed that the idea of body ornament is little pieces of metal on people's ears and hands. Even with people who have money and travel a lot, jewelry isn't ostentatious. It seems that in urban areas the need is stronger for statements of personal expression. In New Hampshire, it's impolite to stand out."

The lack of response to her work there has been disconcerting. "When I wore some of these new pieces, they provoked no comments. There is always an occasional comment in New York. I'm not looking for a positive, or even a constructive reaction, but when people comment by looking, they complete a piece with their eyes.

Stepping Stones Necklace
14k yellow gold,
triangular diamond, 1991

"Feedback from colleagues and galleries helps shape your work. I had to reorganize the way I touch base. Now, I regularly spend a 'library night' looking at art magazines. I've also been making the effort to read books on philosophy of design."

Early influences that have continued to sustain her are a graduate course with Rudolf Arnheim at Columbia and painting as well as jewelry courses with Earl Pardon at Skidmore. "Earl Pardon had certain principles for guiding you through a critique of what you were doing – not calling things 'good' or 'bad,' but evaluating your work in terms of connecting forms to concepts. Arnheim went from one element of design to another and explained why things happen in terms of his psychological and visual research. That gave me a solid grounding in Gestalt psychology, in the way things work."

Indeed, this seems to be reflected in Arentzen's ability to distill visual ideas in configurations that seem uncontrived but irreducible. For example, in a necklace called *Stepping Stones*, in which angled units just meet at irregular intervals, one immediately feels a tenuous balance, a precarious dance from one section to another.

Although two years ago Arentzen's 25-year retrospective at Faber was critically acclaimed, the spring show challenged her to reach beyond past successes. "This was different from other shows," she said. "When we were setting the date, the people at the gallery encouraged me. They said, 'make the stuff that speaks to your heart, and we'll sell it.'"

While welcoming the freedom to create a collection without the commercial constraint of satisfying budgets or tastes of potential customers, Arentzen also recognized that some determinants in the normal process of design had been eliminated. "Ordinarily, when I'm organizing a show for a gallery or a big fair, I take a concept and expand it by trying to make accessories for certain prices and occasions, for shorter or taller people. Although I was still concerned with wearability, this work was not made for the market but in the service of an idea."

Permission to follow her intuition led her to concentrate on a few major works but to forego "drop-dead exhibition pieces" in favor of "things that were smaller and quieter, that made a statement, pleasant or not." Stones were used sparingly and usually seemed to emerge from the colors of the metal around them, rather than to assert an independent presence. The gallery's directive also allowed the simplicity that best exploits the use of 24k gold, which in combination with 14k gold and sometimes silver is contained in a fifth of the pieces. Most often, it occurs in unpretentious, almost casual forms that subtly glow in relation to the metals around it. "It has a warmth that leads the eye in, with a lot of impact in a wonderful way," Arentzen observed.

Although she seemed a bit concerned that, technically, the jewelry world would find nothing new in the show, it does reflect her efforts to deal with some problematic aspects of this softest, purest gold. "There's no place to hide the rough spots; fittings have to be perfect because you can't file away the excess." To offset its softness, she found she could back it with a thin layer of a different gold.

As a spinoff from the show, she intends to continue working with the contrast between 24k gold and other metals. In particular, she wants to pursue a series of pins she refers to as "secrets." Suggestive of samples from the layers of a wooded terrain, these are made with fragmentlike shapes of 24k gold, loosely set in frames and repousséd in a way that both hides and reveals stones and other elements just beneath the surface. "Although we live in an earring culture, pins are the things that lend themselves to themes," Arentzen said. "They are more easily perceived as fine art, and most readily related to the framed form."

She also expressed a special satisfaction with several earrings and pins in which wire gridlike structures held what appeared to be casually formed "shards" of 24k gold. Lightly held in place, they were reminiscent of leaves blown into bramble bushes. "They're like impressions of the flotsam and jetsam of life," she observed. "The geometric wires could be seen as a manmade way of trying to pull something organic together."

In striving for elemental qualities, Arentzen has become aware of certain forms with universal appeal. "All kinds of people have a positive emotional reaction to a wide ring that encloses the finger," she noted. Even when her rings are as dramatic as *Landscape*, a disc that rests on three fingers like a lily pad, the fit of the unseen band is a critical component. However, she also made a choker designed to feel constricting – "like you're jumping out of your skin" – that seems to contradict her usual regard for comfort. This piece emerged from her experience of feeling the press of life's demands from many different directions.

Between the cases of jewelry on the gallery walls hung several finger-painted works on paper, executed with sweeps of black paint and gold-leaf, veiled with tracing paper. "A lot of those are sketches that later may turn out in wax," she said, alluding to the paintings as "background noise." The brisk strokes and swirls suggested warmup exercises for the linear patterns, the ridges and incisions carved in the wax Arentzen prepares for casting. "Drawing is where the idea becomes tangible for the first time. It may be just a reference, but it tells a lot about the way you work."

For Arentzen, casting is a critical tool for making textured parts, which she later assembles, interspersing them with smooth components. She values the handmade quality of the wax units that sometimes carry fingerprints or drops of melted wax into the metal. Her reliance on casters in New York is a major drawback in living far away from the city. The easy procedure of delivering wax locally and picking up the metal on the same day has been replaced with a mail-order system that takes two weeks to complete. The time gap, however, has not yet discouraged Arentzen from using this approach to working out her ideas.

Noticeably absent from the recent show were the elegant, sleekly sophisticated, geometric-patterned forms that Arentzen had perfected, using colors achieved through patination in the married-metals technique. Two years ago, an article in *Ornament*[2] discussed this work, along with Arentzen's conviction that their complex, pieced-fabrication served as a refreshing complement to the textured work. Arentzen's present distance from casting facilities suggests that this might have been the logical direction to follow, but her ideas have moved away from it. "I've nearly stopped doing it, not because I feel negative about it, but because I'm finished with it. I resisted the temptation to do it; the flat, graphic quality didn't seem as important as the landscape ideas."

Perhaps a key to the vitality of Arentzen's work is that, in addition to continually scrutinizing and reflecting on the visual world, she also keeps her inner sense of texture and pattern alive by a regular routine of both tap and ice dancing. With the exhibition's opening behind her, she was looking forward to her 50th birthday, an occasion for a cartwheel. Predictably, the embodied memory of that arc in space will someday find expression in gold.

■ *Patricia Malarcher is a fiber artist and craft critic.*

NOTES

1. Smith, Dido, "Glenda Arentzen's Magic Metal," *Craft Horizons*, February 1976.

2. Blauer, Ettagale, "Glenda Arentzen: Contemporary Goldsmith," *Ornament*, 12 (3), 1989.

Rebekah Laskin

Finding a Voice within the Material

by Nancy Boxenbaum

Rebekah Laskin is an enamelist with a new subtlety and depth of purpose unique to the metalsmithing community. She has taken a medium that has been if not predictable or stagnant, then at least possessed of a rigid hierarchy and turned it on its ear. Traditionally, enamel works have lustrous surfaces, are brightly colored and are characteristically precious. Not anymore! The label *enamelist,* with all its attendant esthetic as well as practical connotations, must now be reconsidered in light of Laskin's most recent works.

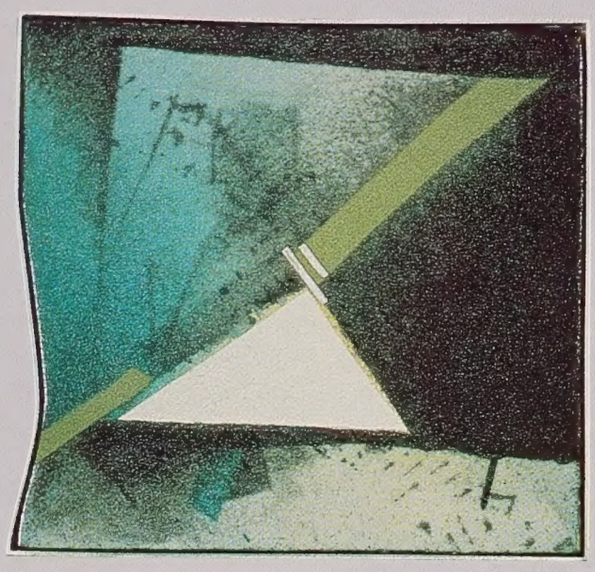
Laskin has exploited the possibilities of enamel not only in terms of its physical properties and technical applications, but also in its potential as a means of communicating emotion. Her works, in particular her brooches, are a constant quest for self-expression. She has gravitated toward abstract compositions with a desire to avoid specific symbolic meaning and to allow emotion to be the primary content.

Laskin's surface employs a matte finish, rendering the work even less precious and less reminiscent of enamel. Her surfaces are strangely evocative of "non-glorified" artistic traditions. They convey the illusion of parchment-paper scrolls that absorb color and maintain a distinct surface texture. Also, because there is neither the typical glassy surface nor the glare, there is no interference between the viewer and the piece; she has stripped away that quality of enamel to allow for more direct communication of her imagery.

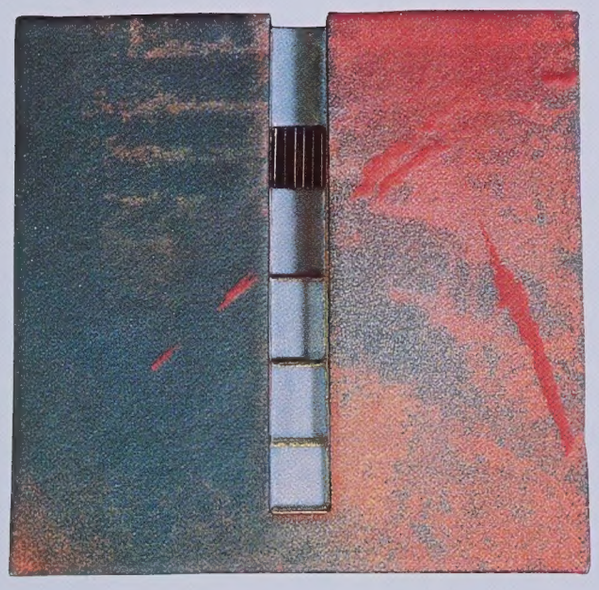
Having always done drawings as well as jewelry, Laskin has transferred much of the latter's sensibility onto her small, wearable surfaces. Lines are drawn on the surface in a delicate way. The overall composition flows from one shape to another, created by the painterly quality of the enamel in which shapes look as if they have been brushed on. These shapes seem to float and glide over the surface, exchanging places. There is an organic sense of motion, and underlying current beneath the calm exterior.

In Laskin's recent work her palette and overall esthetics have become gradually darker – moodier. The colors are somber, not pretty or cheerful as is often associated with lustrous enamel. And the colors are not easily isolated; they are not distinct patches of melted glass trapped by cloisonné wire. Her choices must be understood in terms of color schemes or color combinations that carry mood and sensation.

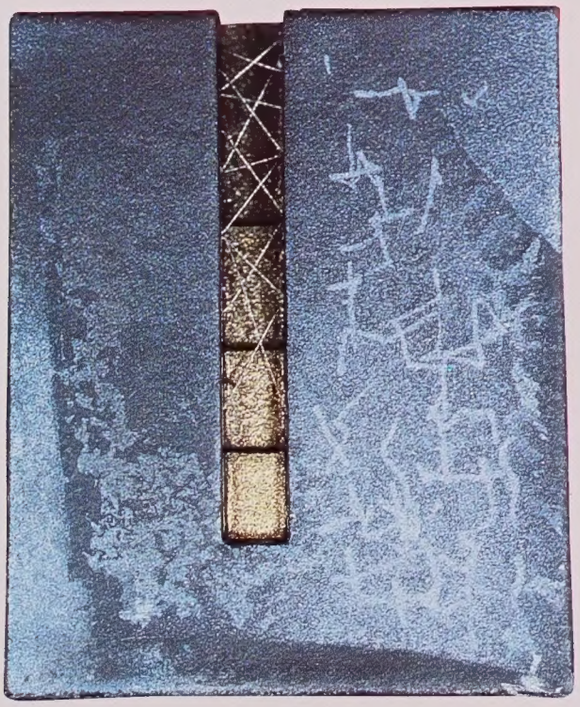
1. *Brooch*, enamel on copper, sterling, 2⅛ x 2⅛", 1986



2. *Brooch*, enamel on copper, steel plexiglass, 2 x 2¼ x ¼", 1988



3. *Brooch*, enamel on copper, steel, plexiglass, 2¼ x 2¼ x ¼", 1990



4. *Brooch*, enamel on copper, plexiglass, 2⅜ x 1⅞ x ¼", 1990

Right
Details of the brooches shown on page 27

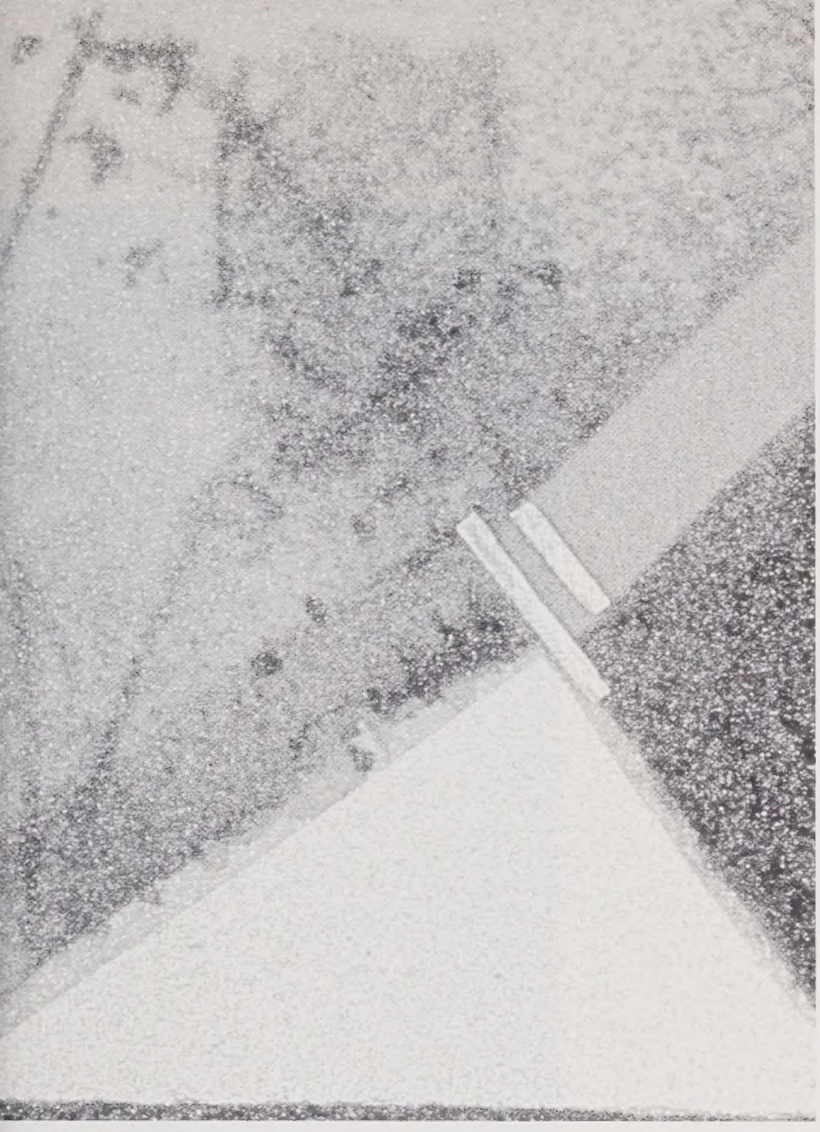
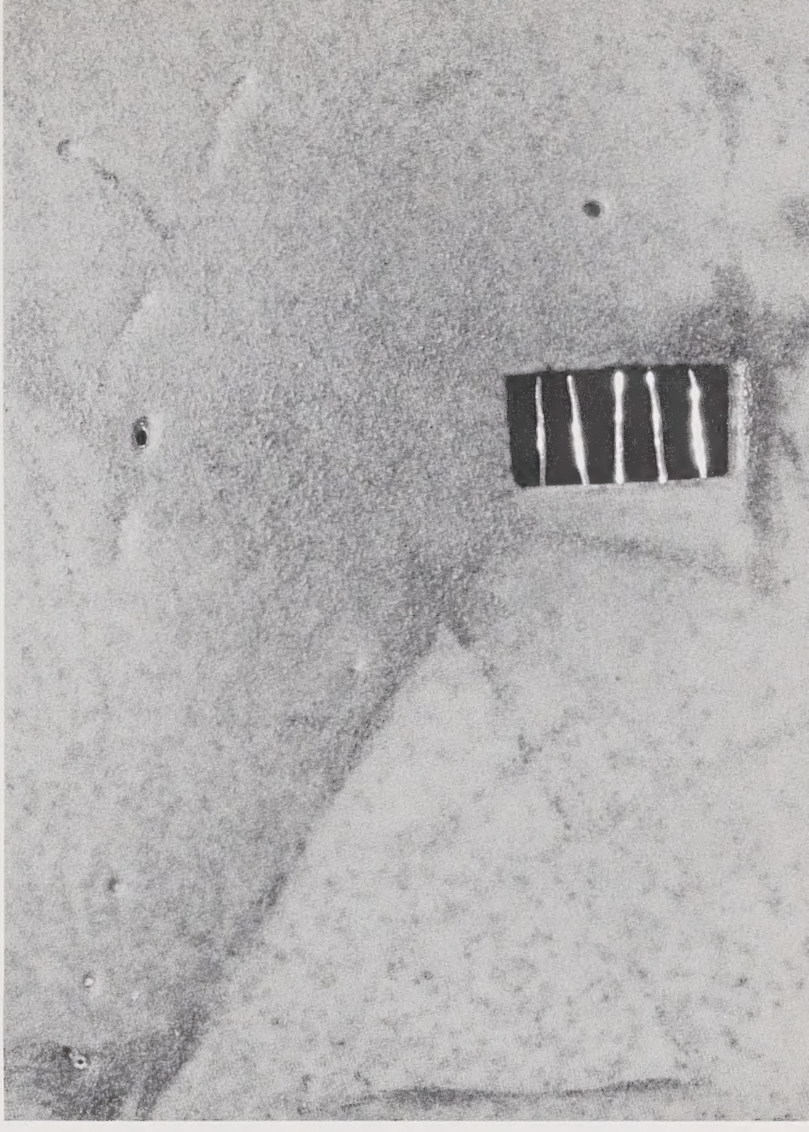
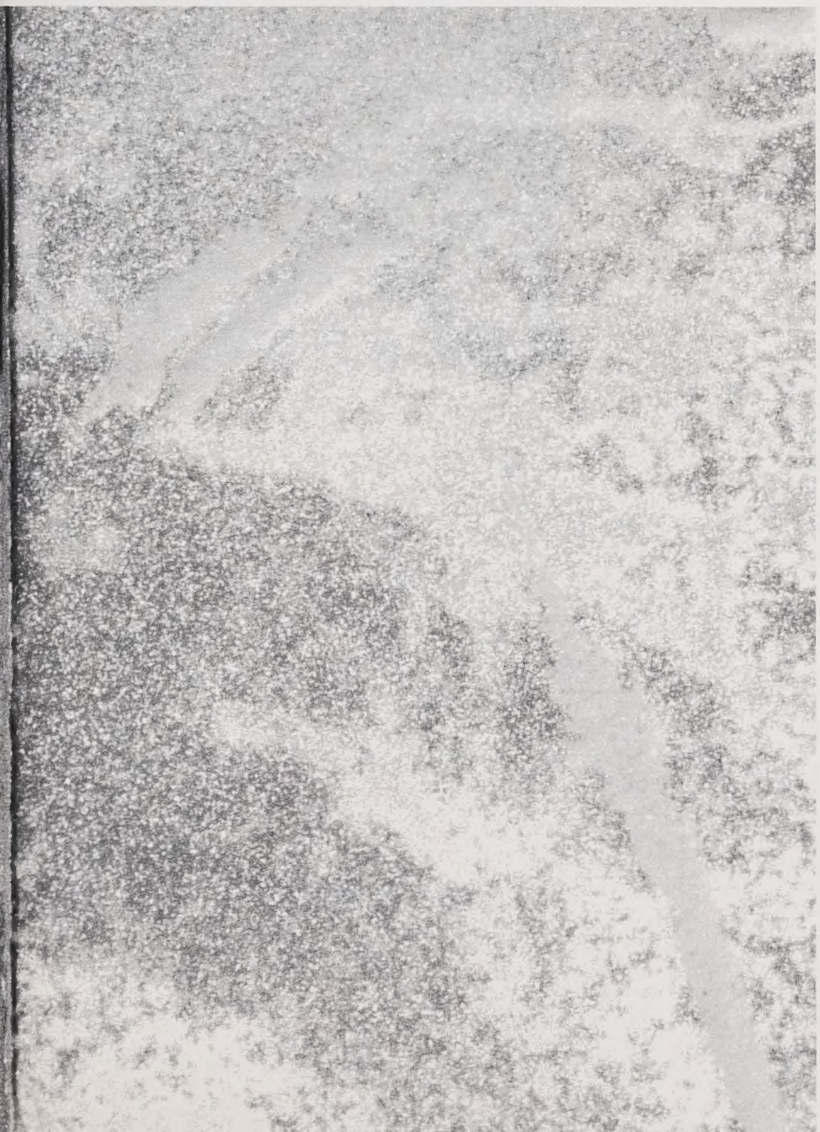
One change in these recent brooches is that they are "unframed"; the silver borders that used to encompass the enamel surfaces (Figure 1) are now gone. The absence of that finishing touch, that little hint of precious metal, serves to make the work less decorative. In the past, the shape of her work was rectangular but more amorphous, more off-plumb, lending an air of the organic. The current pieces are squarer, the lines straighter. This strict sense of geometry is not only a formal feature but a metaphoric reference. These pieces are really about architecture, and their physical structure is more rigid to reflect that sensibility. There is now a powerful contrast between the floating, still amorphous, patches of color on the surface and the geometric, structural, architectural construction in and around the surface.

The first instance of actually cutting into the structure occurred in a series with little "windows" (Figure 2). This was a dramatic departure for Laskin, who had until then staunchly maintained the sanctity of her surfaces. From these pieces, she expanded the hole, creating long, vertical channels that practically divided the works in two. After that, a built-in stairway seemed like the natural culmination to this progression (Figures 3 and 4): she started with a small hole in the middle of the brooch, leading nowhere; then tunnels crawled out toward the edge; and eventually, her means of getting there became a staircase.

Laskin's disruption of the work's surface highlights a critical issue – sense of space. Whether this space is interior or exterior, it draws in and envelops the viewer. That is one of the fascinations of her brooches and why they succeed so well on such a small scale: they demand to be examined up close, so that as the viewer approaches them, everything else in the surrounding environment fades away. The staircase seems to have developed out of this physical and metaphoric manipulation. It provides a direct, figurative reference to entering space, a palpable means rather than just a surface illusion. This has been a major transition in Laskin's work. Whereas space used to be created through the layering of colors, the juxtaposition of light and dark hues and contrasting, drawn shapes on the surface, she has now opened up her work literally and figuratively.

Without becoming a miniaturist, Laskin has created "mini" expanses of color, evocative of something infinitely larger than what is physically present, a sense of scale reminiscent of the Abstract Expressionist desire to create canvases symbolic of the wide-open spaces of the United States. Pushing her painting to the very edges of the brooch's surface suggests a much more expansive whole. By disengaging her brooches from the realms of the precious and the decorative, muting her palette, discarding the silver frames, using a matte finish, a more geometric line and penetrating the surface, Rebekah Laskin has shed many of the layers that previously veiled her work and has achieved her ultimate goal – direct communication of emotional content.

Nancy Boxenbaum is the editorial assistant at the College Art Association, New York.

THE GREAT PECTORAL FROM THE TOLSTAYA MOGILA

A Work of the Certomlyk Master and His Studio

BY WOLF RUDOLPH

In 1971, excavations in a kurgan (grave mound) named Tolstaya Mogila – big barrow – in the city of Ordzonikidzhe in the southern Ukraine brought to light a spectacular golden pectoral in the underground grave of a warrior, dating to c. 300 B.C. After being shown in 1975 in the United States during the exhibition *From the Land of Scythians*, it is now in its permanent deposit at the Museum of Historical Treasures in Kiev.* This grave mound belonged to a Scythian aristocrat and is typical for this type of burial. Scythians buried their leaders with all their possessions in such a subterranean tomb, over which they constructed a monumental earthen mound. The largest of these royal tombs, only some 20 miles away from Ordzonikidzhe is the Certomlyk kurgan. This site – where a huge silver-gilt amphora was found – is responsible for the naming of the anonymous goldsmith whose work will be discussed here.

These gold objects from Southern Russia known today are but a few survivors of a systematic looting of Scythian graves over the past millennia, and they represent only a small portion of what once was an overwhelming wealth of gold jewelry in these burial chambers. To date, less than a dozen objects of the Certomlyk Master's studio have been identified, although certainly there existed many more. Among those remaining, the great pectoral (Figure 1) from the Tolstaya Mogila is clearly a grand oeuvre. It remains one of the most astounding pieces of gold jewelry to survive from the classical world, on a par with works by such masters as Cellini or Fabergé.

This article presents the first results of research on the master and his studio, focusing upon the pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila, the object that best demonstrates the style and mastery of techniques.

WR

1 Pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila, Ordzonikidze, Museum of Historical Treasures, Kiev, gold, front view. All figures are after Galania & Gratsch, *Scythian Art*

* Visitors should be aware that most recent information suggests the pectoral on display in Kiev is, in fact, a cast copy that does not convey all the nuances and subtleties of the original.

The Pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila

The pectoral (Figure 1) was formed from pure gold of apparently over 20k. The rich, yellow golden color of the surface and the absence of noticeable impurities suggests that it was treated to achieve this effect, possibly by means of depletion gilding. It measures 30.5 centimeters across and weighs 1145 grams (c. 40.4 ounces). A number of smaller components, now missing, would have brought the weight to approximately 1200 grams. This damage is the result of the active wear that this trinket endured, because traces, especially on the floral frieze, suggest that it might have been worn in battle, where it was seriously damaged. Subsequently, it was taken apart to be repaired to the state in which it was placed in the tomb.

The pectoral has three friezes, labeled A, B, C, from top to bottom. To complete it, more than 160 principal elements were incorporated into the design, not counting the assorted decorative wires. A short survey of its parts gives some idea of the enormous complexity of the planning and production process – for the closure: two lionhead finials, four box settings, 32 short lengths of loop-in-loop chain, two large hinges; for the front section: two trapezoidal box settings, four twisted, hollow hoops (labeled 1 to 4, from top to bottom), one sheet of gold, cut in a lunula shape, one double-T strip, 50 cast figures of humans, animals and two gorytoi, typical Scythian bow-and-arrow containers. In addition, at least 44 floral elements for frieze B were cast, coupled with more than 20 – an undetermined number is missing now – cut-out flowers, most of them double-tiered.

Almost all of these parts, in turn, required complex preliminary production steps. The twisted torques, for example, were built from long, convex strips of sheet-gold, with their convex sides up, which were twisted into elongated spirals and then joined at the seams. Into the groove between the strips a continuous line of beaded wire was mounted. The torques increase gradually in diameter from torques 1 to 4. The large diameter of torque 4 required an additional stabilizer that was provided in form of an I-beam strip mounted on its top (see Figure 3).

The Certomlyk Master cast the figures in open molds. These were modeled in slightly higher relief, so as to appear almost three-dimensional. To fit the contours of the human body better, the backs of the figures in friezes A and C were worked accordingly. Along their outer borders runs a narrow, flattened band; from there, the back is partly hollowed out like the interior of a fruit. By leaving the framing band along the edges, the areas where the sculptures were soldered onto the torques remained relatively strong, but the hollowed back portion assured less friction.

Techniques

The techniques used were straightforward yet extremely effective, including sheet-gold cutting, soldering, mold making, casting and extensive cold working, as well as production of varying wires, such as plain, beaded or spiral twisted. Stamping has been used for the tongue pattern on the frontal side of the double-T bar on torque 4, and glass inlay occurs on the flower leaves. Except for the large granules in some of the rosettes in frieze B, there was no granulation.

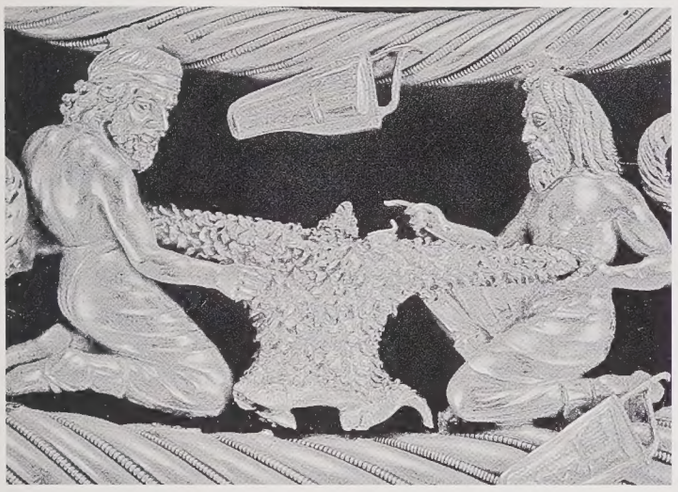
Iconography

In each of the three interstices between the box-mounted torques, a frieze was placed. Friezes A and C carry figurative scenes, while B displays an exuberant growth of tendrils and foliage, in whose center five doves are perched in the thicket. Frieze B refrains from telling a story and thus remains neutral to serve as a mediator between the upper and lower ones, between the depiction of growth and that of destruction. In frieze A the peaceful togetherness of suckling mother animals with four human figures among them is the dominant theme. By contrast, fierce fighting prevails in frieze C, as animals of all sizes and mythic griffins battle each other, the stronger ones wreaking relentless havoc and death upon the weaker ones.

All of the nearly 50 cast figures are remarkable for their exquisite execution: miniature sculptures of such nuance and detail are very rare in the history of goldsmithing. In the central scene (Figure 2), for example, the keen observation of the two chieftains' faces and bodies makes them individual portraits. The face on the left is rounder than the one on the right; the wavy hair of the first contrasts with the cork-screw locks of the second. Even the varying facial bone structures have been depicted, such as the arches of the brows, cheekbones and noses. The left prince, in addition, wears a head band, a highly unusual insignia among Scythians and certainly a status symbol. Similar detailed observations hold true also for the two young milkers.

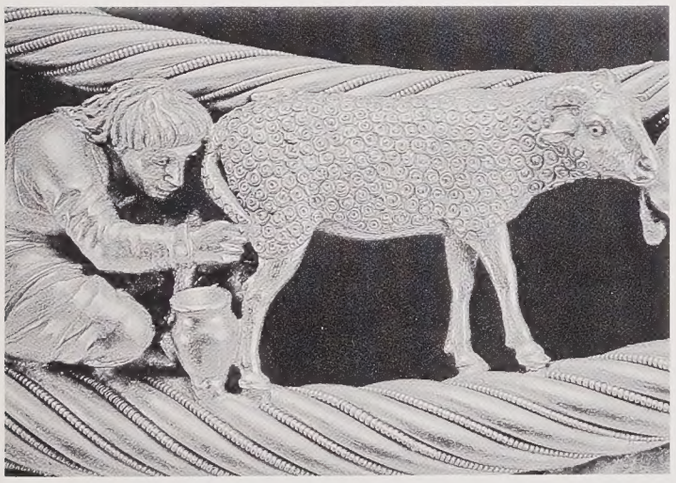
As with the humans, the treatment of the animals reveals the artist's intimate knowledge of certain species in their often hostile coexistence, demonstrated in the almost personal, snapshotlike characterization of each animal. Such is the case with the wild boar or the hapless stag (Figure 3). The latter is just being brought down by a panther and a lion. The minutia of the stag's pelt and antlers include a strip of skin dangling from the antlers over its forehead. This constitutes a shred of the fine epidermis that covers the regrowing antler during the yearly regrowth. Thus, this deadly fight takes place in spring or early summer, which also would account for the presence of the young animals in frieze A. Here, again, the nuanced depiction of the slight age differential between the two calves – one already more massive of body and hence longer fed, the other bony, of stalky, angular folded legs, very recently born – as well as the "sheepness" of the milked animal on the right side (Figure 4), is conclusive evidence of a genre at its best, based on keen observation of everyday detail.

The Certomlyk Master, however, accomplished more than a series of brilliant individual studies, he successfully blended the separate parts of each frieze into a unbroken compositional flow. He also instilled a special atmosphere through the intimate interaction of the two kneeling men sharing in the sewing of a sheep-fleece garment, a sweat absorbing undershirt to be worn under metal armor.



2 Pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila, Freize A, central scene: two chieftans

3 Pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila, Freize C, right side: stag being felled by panther and lion

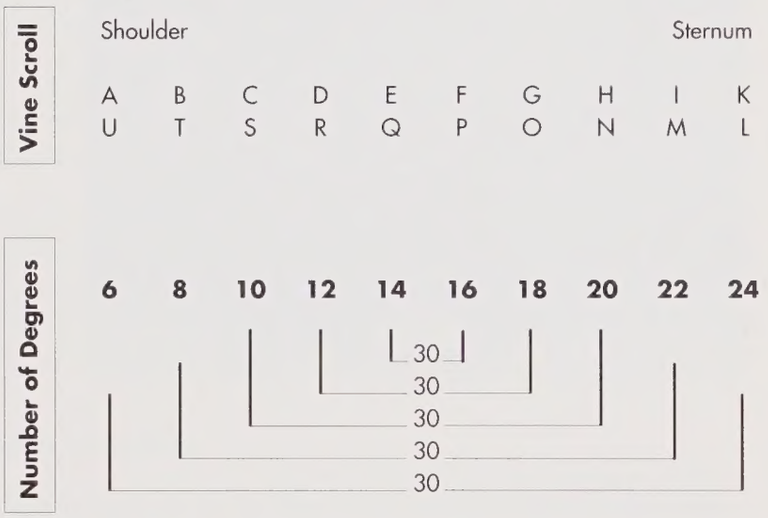


4 Pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila, Frieze A, left side: milking of sheep

The Design Plan

To compose the pectoral, the Certomlyk Master had to overcome the quandary of the inexorably diminishing size of the figures from the center to the narrow corners, made even more difficult by the necessity to space them convincingly on a circle. To solve this problem satisfactorily, he had to have carefully planned the design of the pectoral with an apparent focus on frieze B. This is evident by the fact that the floral scrolls are placed in intervals relating to the center of a circle, placed on the middle axis of the pectoral. On axes radiating from the circle's center the cores of the vine scrolls in frieze B are placed at precise interstices determined by a series of angles that diminish regularly from the center towards the sides. The following diagram gives the sequence for one-half of the symmetrical pectoral. The vine tendrils are labelled A through K for the right body side and L through U for the left. In the diagram they are placed together according to their size.

Pectoral: Frieze B



Beginning from the center with a 24° angle, the angles diminish by a 2°-step down to 6°. The whole system is based on a sequence of 12°, or fractions thereof, since adding together the degrees, starting at opposite ends and moving inward (A+K, B+I, etc.), shows each sum of two angles always to equal 30° = 2.5 x 12. A 30° angle, in turn is one-twelfth (1/12) of a full circle of 360°.

The duodecimal system applies also to the decorated section. Each half (A through K , L through U) measures 150°, for a total of 300°. From these, however, has to be subtracted one unit of 12°, since it was counted twice in the center, once each for K and L. This leaves 288° which is the sum of 2 x 144 = 2 x 12 x 12.

This system explains, at least in part, the manner in which the Certomlyk Master planned the pectoral. There seem to be other regular numerical relationships between portions of the pectoral, which remain yet to be clarified in detail. But it is already obvious that this precision and sophistication of planning is a phenomenon that occurs in other works of the studio. Beyond the sheer mathematics, this master's highly developed sense of composition and rhythm gave life to his creations. An additional contribution to this effect is the use of ornament and colored glass inlays to emphasize surface patterns.

5 Silver Amphora from the Certomlyk kurgan, Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, front view

The Certomlyk Master and His Studio

The pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila is the most complex of the surviving objects from the Certomlyk Master and his studio. It is also the best and most explicit example of his personal style and genius for creating miniature sculpture. From this pectoral, along with a number of other gold objects, a picture is emerging of a jeweler's workshop operating during the height of Scythian power and wealth. The exclusive appearance of these gold objects in what best is described as royal tombs suggests that the goldsmith and his atelier worked for the ruling upper class who were commissioning such objects for their own use. Given the Scythians love of gold as described by the Greek historian Herodotos in the fifth century B.C. and gold's documented association with high class status, this is not surprising.

This anonymous goldsmith of the early Hellenistic period brought to the established art of Scythia a distinct vision, manifest especially in his emphasis on a naturalistic portrayal of humans and animals. Stylistic, iconographical and technical attributes show him to have been the outstanding master within a group of gifted craftsmen, whose working area extended from the Ukrainian steppes to the Caucasus. The Certomlyk Master's personal style emerges most clearly in the sculptures, but it can be detected also in the lively, relatively natural rendition of the floral frieze B. Other, slightly differing styles suggest additional pairs of hands within the studio.

At first glance, the formal esthetic language of the studio seems thoroughly that of classical Greece, and the repertoire of forms comes, indeed, from the art of the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods. But not only are the topics unmistakably Scythian, this artist developed also an unquestionable personal style that had little in common with the idealizing art of Greece, especially that of Athens. In his methods of mingling established forms with works bearing his own artistic stamp, he succeeded in holding before the horse-loving chieftains a mirror in which they saw, probably with great satisfaction, their own world. They found their environment wrought with genre images without frills, immediately recognizable and appreciated.

Through the distinctive blend of established Greek art forms with prominent personal and distinct studio styles, archaeological research has been able to identify this master. It was totally unexpected to discover a previously unknown and anonymous master goldsmith, a major talent in the history of jewelry making. With his artistic gift he translated into visual language an impression of the world around him. Even though he lived in what is considered by many just the "provinces," the far region of the Greek world, the Certomlyk Master is emerging as one of the first original miniature sculptors who flourished during the heyday of the Hellenistic period. This makes him an important figure for jewelry making as well as for this particular period of Greek art.

The overall style of the Certomlyk studio can be called eclectic. The floral ornaments on the body of the silver amphora from Certomlyk (Figure 5) were executed by another goldsmith whose preference lay with a less lively and organic rendition of the foliage, "quoting" elements – such as leaf shapes – from the late fifth century, some three generations earlier. By contrast, the temperament of the Certomlyk Master himself emerges on the shoulder of the torque with the high-relief figures of horse tamers, where, again, he demonstrates his talent for close observation and natural rendering. A different hand also executed the small pectoral from the Bolschaya Blisnitza (number 5 below), whose animals were formed with fewer anatomical details, even though the willful liveliness of these young creatures is captured beautifully.

The appearance of such varying styles within one studio may have had several reasons. Aside from eclecticism, the influence of those who commissioned the jewelry could well have dictated a stylistic preference. The working period of the studio spans the time from c. 350/340 B.C. to c. 300/290, leaving the possibility open that, in fact, the oeuvre represents more than one generation of goldsmiths, among whom the Certomlyk Master was the most outstanding and independent.

Most important objects identified to date

1. *Pectoral* from the Tolstaya Mogila, Ordzonikidze, gold, enamel (*Scythian Art*, Figures 118-121): men, animals, and griffins represented in two sculptured friezes, plus one floral frieze with birds. (Certomlyk Master)

2. *Amphora* from the Certomlyk kurgan, gilded silver (*Scythian Art*, figures 265-268): men and horses represented in one sculptured frieze, body with floral with birds, animal and griffin fights on shoulder, three plastic spouts on lower body. (Certomlyk Master and studio)

3. *Torque* (necklet) from Kul Oba kurgan, gold, enamel (*Scythian Art*, figures 126-127): two Scythian riders on horses protomai (front halves only). (Certomlyk Master)

4. *Comb* from the Solocha kurgan, gold (*Scythian Art*, figures 128-129): three Scythians fighting, one mounted, two on foot. (Certomlyk Master)

5. *Pectoral* from the Bolschaya Blisnitza kurgan, tomb of the third lady, gold, enamel (*Scythian Art*, figures 255-256): young animals. (Certomlyk studio)

6. *Pair of bracelets* from Bolschaya Blisnitza kurgan, bronze, gold foil, enamel (*Scythian Art*, figure 234) two suckling lionesses jumping. (Certomlyk Master and studio)

Identification of other items by the Certomlyk Master and his studio and analysis of the work – both metal plate and gold jewelry – continues. Like any great master of his craft, the Certomlyk Master created vessels as well as personal adornments, and as can be seen from the silver amphora from the Certomlyk kurgan, he was a genius at both.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Renata Rolle, Göttingen, and her assistant Wilhelm Herzig, as well as to my colleagues from the Institute of Archaeology at Kiev. Juliette Graver, Bloomington, graciously helped test the mathematical design.

Further reading

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Reflections & Remedies

A Continuing Dialogue on the State of Metalsmithing and Jewelry

by Donald Friedlich and Judith Mitchell

"I am not an expert in jewelry...I feel uneasy about giving opinions," warned Garth Clark in our interview with him, which *Metalsmith* published last summer (Volume 10, Number 3, Summer 1990). Despite his disclaimer and the brevity of his foray into jewelry, Clark's frank assessment of the field – including his encounters with curatorial indifference, a fashion-oriented public, poorly crafted work and jewelers who wished they were sculptors – inspired much discussion and debate in the jewelry community.

In order to provide other perspectives, we asked members of that community's various segments to offer their own assessments of the field. We spoke to two jewelers, a curator, a collector and a gallery owner, all of whom have demonstrated a serious, long-term commitment to jewelry. Each was interviewed separately. They are:

Jeweler Jamie Bennett, a professor of art at SUNY New Paltz. Bennett was represented by Garth Clark's CDK Gallery during its short life.

Susan Cummins, co-owner and director of the seven-year-old Susan Cummins Gallery in Mill Valley, California.

Jeweler Lisa Gralnick, who was also represented by CDK Gallery. Gralnick's work has been shown widely in both Europe and the United States.

New Jersey collector Sandra Grotta. Grotta has been collecting American craft for 30 years along with her husband Louis, an American Craft Council trustee. Grotta is an associate of the American Craft Museum.

Kenneth Trapp, curator of decorative art at the Oakland Museum in California. Trapp is actively acquiring contemporary Californian jewelry for the museum's permanent collection.

DF, JM

Friedlich: CDK Gallery is history and Helen Drutt is no longer operating in New York. What do you think the future holds in terms of other jewelry galleries? Do we need them? What does it take for a jewelry gallery to succeed?

Grotta: I think the field definitely needs galleries. Galleries have played a significant role in nurturing my interest in jewelry. For example, the late Joke Van Ommen of the VO Gallery exposed me to the work of Babetto. Because of her, I purchased a gold ring of his which is now one of my favorite pieces. And my very first exposure to contemporary art jewelry was through a tiny gallery (Sculpture to Wear) located in the Plaza Hotel many years ago. It was the first place I saw interesting work, and it made an immediate, lasting impression on me.

Gralnick: The only jewelry galleries that have any chance of succeeding are those run by people who have been deeply involved in the field for a long time, way before they opened a gallery. Joke was able to do it and Ellen Rieben is now following in her footsteps. Helen Drutt is able to do it. We need more people involved in the field to open galleries. I don't know who the hell I think these people are. We may not know them yet.

Trapp: To succeed, jewelry needs at least one strong gallery to promote it. The problem is that when you have just one strong gallery, it will have a definite esthetic philosophy and good jewelers who don't share it will find themselves excluded.

Bennett: Most jewelry galleries in the United States are not based on a specific esthetic. There are exceptions, but most tend to present either a big horizontal movement – they show 20 artists of quality who have 20 different esthetics – or a big vertical movement – they show great people and real junk at the same time on the same wall in the same case.

It's possible that craft galleries showing studio jewelry will become an anachronism. Jewelers will seek galleries that understand and advocate their work, and where the work fits the thinking of the gallery regardless of the medium. Galleries able to get past their clients' initial resistance to jewelry won't be the jewelry houses but those galleries that have a particular esthetic. The galleries that are concerned and can articulate the thinking in the work and its relationship to jewelry will succeed. It's no different than explaining a pot's relationship to pots or a painting's relationship to painting. They get behind the work because they're advocates of its idea and do not have a pure art agenda. When they reject jewelry, it's not because it's jewelry, but because it doesn't fit their esthetic.

Grotta: There's some value to a gallery's exhibiting a range of jewelry. I've gotten several people to start collecting by introducing them to less challenging jewelry first. You don't start them off with a slate brooch. You get them to try on an unusual gold pin and then gradually they find themselves drawn to the more challenging pieces. People are very insecure about wearing art jewelry and they sometimes find the gallery atmosphere intimidating.

Friedlich: What can galleries do to promote the field and generate enthusiasm among collectors and curators?

Trapp: The better galleries serve almost as adjunct curators for me. Most of the gallery directors I've encountered have a background in art similar to my own. Although they are operating in a profit-orientated situation, they run their galleries in the time-honored Eurocentric manner of adhering to an artistic standard. As a result, they bring objects to my attention that I may otherwise not see. After all, I'm only one person and there are thousands of artists.

And, let's face it, the galleries also play a part in validating works of art. There's a hierarchy of galleries, from the ones that everyone respects down to the antiquey, flea market, tourist types. Curators pay attention to the work shown at the most prestigious galleries.

Bennett: I think it's important for gallery owners to help clients discern and communicate the difference between vanity jewelry and studio jewelry. Vanity jewelry is a commercially motivated phenomenon that the maker feels free to alter to assure financial success. The work is conceived as appealing to the client on a purely emotional basis. This tradition is very different from studio jewelry, which is based on esthetic and ideological inquiries, and is a cognitive activity, not solely emotive. Unfortunately, many jewelry clients still tend to attribute the values of vanity jewelry to studio jewelry. They may say they judge the work on its esthetic merit, but, by and large, they still look for satisfaction from it the same way they do from the pearls around their necks or the high-karat rings on their fingers. The field needs gallery directors who are able to say to clients, "Hey, you're looking for something in this work that isn't there. You have to differentiate it from your diamond ring just as you differentiate your Limoges china from your Jun Kaneko plate."

Cummins: Gallery owners need to be comfortable with the process of selling art that is to be displayed on the body. It's a much more intimate process that selling art that is to be hung on walls. I sell both, so I'm able to make a direct comparison. With jewelry, you spend a lot more time with the client. You engage in conversations about how the color and texture of the materials relate to them, to their sense of their own coloring and textures. You can't stand back from the piece and intellectually argue its merits. You have to get in there and put the thing on. The gallery owner has to enjoy interacting with collectors.

Friedlich: Why do collectors collect? To what are they responding?

Cummins: At this point, people collect jewelry for their own personal reasons rather than for the status it brings. There's much more of an emotional and intuitive response to jewelry on the part of most collectors, a subliminal reaction to the work rather than an intellectual, rational approach. Perhaps it's more of a feminine kind of occupation. Women are my main clientele. I like to work with them.

Bennett: I've had nearly as many men buy my jewelry as women, some of whom are simply interested in the format of jewelry, or who collect other things that relate to my work. I'm not aware of one situation where a person bought my work because it went with an outfit. People collect jewelry for the same reason they collect anything else – because they're passionate about it and the work has made an impact on them – and for no other reason.

Grotta: We collect all kinds of craft. We collect ceramics. We collect baskets. Our furniture is all by craftspeople. We set our table with work by Jim Makins and Karen Karnes. Craft is an everyday thing for us. So, in one sense, collecting jewelry is just another component of our collecting. But, I also have a passion for jewelry. I like the old jewelry displayed in the Metropolitan Museum. I like folk jewelry and I like architectural jewelry. I can't articulate why. I don't take an intellectual approach to it. I'm not concerned with process. It's fun – wearing jewelry is fun.

Friedlich: What is the role of wearability in what Jamie refers to as "studio" jewelry? To what extent should the jeweler consider wearability, and to what extent does the collector consider it?

Cummins: The collectors I represent want to make sure they can wear the work, but they're not asking, "Does it go with my red dress?" The people I consider collectors respond esthetically. I don't engage in conversations relating to fashion.

Grotta: I wear all my jewelry. I love to go to a party where everyone is wearing pearls and show up in a wild necklace. I'm not sure that's helping the field. People tend to look at me and say, "That's ridiculous." But I wear all the wild things. I wear my David Watkins pieces. I love Gijs Bakker. I have a house brooch by Künzli – a big red house that you wear on your shoulder. I can go to a party in a wild paper necklace and feel as good about it as someone else does in diamonds.

Gralnick: I've always believed that the work should be wearable or should have something to do with being worn. The act of wearing jewelry is an integral part of the work's statement. I have nothing against anti-jewelry. I think that's as valid a way to go as any other, and to some extent my own work has gone that way. But, totally disregarding the issue of wearability – making an object and slapping on a pin back or a chain – is silly. For jewelry to be complete it requires a wearer. Or it can be complete without a wearer, but the idea of the wearer has to be part of what's happening in the piece.

Bennett: We need to be careful when we use the term "wearability." If you consider a piece unwearable because it takes 35 minutes every time you go to put it on, or it weighs a pound, then, yes, there's a problem with the piece's wearability. But if what you're objecting to is the fact that people keep looking at your chest every five minutes when you wear it, then you have an ideological problem, not a physical one. Wearing significant jewelry changes one's persona. If you're interested in the work, you have to be willing to make that change. If you buy an important painting or sculpture, you'll prepare a site for it in your home. Preparing the body or clothing for the wearing of exceptional jewelry means you're paying attention to it. We should also realize that there is a lot of work that extends the thinking about jewelry – that it is not about physicality or being visually pleasing. We should not apply the same truths of wearability to this work.

Cummins: There is definitely room for artists to decide that they need to stretch the parameters to the point where work becomes unwearable, or so difficult to wear that it can be worn only on very special occasions. This type of work should be viewed as an extension of the jewelry world, just as conceptual art is an extension of the painting or sculptural worlds. I think this kind of work is very significant. It inspires artists intellectually and gives them a deeper understanding of the field. Much of this work is done in the university setting, and perhaps university museums are the appropriate venue for showing it. In galleries, I think the emphasis should be on the wearable.

Friedlich: How does the jeweler's feelings about his or her own work affect the work itself and the field in general?

Trapp: Sometimes I sense confusion in the work that I think may stem from the artist's confusion about what the work is supposed to be. When jewelry that is meant to be worn is displayed in a museum setting, it can become static. Just by the nature of its being exhibited, it's reduced to miniature sculpture. This is one of the things about jewelry that frustrates a curator, and I think it's confusing to some artists. Are they making jewelry to be worn as jewelry, or are they making jewelry to be displayed as sculpture? I think some artists need to go back and ask themselves the most fundamental questions. What am I doing? Why am I doing it?

Gralnick: I feel comfortable being a jeweler, but many people in the field seem to be fighting that label. There are also many people in the field who paint or sculpt in addition to making jewelry and who see their own jewelry as inferior to their other work just because it's jewelry. Just by virtue of the fact that painting and sculpture are what they are, people see them as inherently superior. That really bothers me. For the most part, if you ask Europeans what they do, they say, "I'm a jeweler" or "I'm a goldsmith," but if you ask Americans what they do, they say, "I'm an artist." The next question is always going to be, "Well, what do you make? Do you paint? Do you sculpt?" So, you're going to have to tell eventually. My feeling is this field will go nowhere until the people in it can say they're jewelers and feel good about it.

Bennett: My work is about jewelry. I really take offense when someone calls my jewelry small sculpture of little paintings. My work is full size, full scale. I may be interested in its painterly aspects due to my questioning color and form, but that's not new to jewelry. I think the people who are seriously involved in their work are serious about being jewelers. If you are going to make jewelry, then you should be committed to jewelry and place a value on jewelry. If you don't, how can you ever expect anyone else to? I should point out that I work in a number of mediums and I place no creative hierarchy among them.

Friedlich: You may be committed to jewelry and place value on it. But the larger art world seems to place very little value on it. Why is this? And how do we gain credibility?

Cummins: The first step is to define and understand the limitations of jewelry, because every art form derives its strength from its limitations. Maybe the limitations are that it has to be a certain size, it has to be placed on a specific site, it has to be made of certain materials. Whatever the limitations are, they must be defined. Then you can ask, "Now, who can work within them the most brilliantly?" Like every other craft medium that has made inroads into the art world, jewelry needs to develop its own idiosyncratic vocabulary and perspectives before it can adequately deal with that question. For example, one limitation of jewelry is its relation to the human body. The implications of this are not easily addressed by existing critical vocabularies. We need a concerted effort on the part of writers to develop an appropriate vocabulary. Of course, we also need artists to approach their work thoughtfully, to consider carefully what they're going to put into a piece and what they're going to allow the wearer to bring to it.

Much contemporary jewelry is beautiful, but that's not enough. When the esthetic thrill is combined with serious critical appraisal and historical perspective – that's what will engage curators and collectors.

Grotta: As a collector, I find publications very important. I subscribe to all the magazines, both American and international. They are not only educational, but they let you know where you can go to see the work. If you want to attract more collectors, it's crucial that the work be seen by the public. I also buy every book on the field that I can find.

Bennett: We need critical and sensible evaluation that asks jewelers, and, more particularly, has jewelers asking themselves, what does your work have to do with jewelry and what are the consequences of your inquiry?" Thoughtful jewelers will respond to these questions in work that challenges and clarifies what the nature of studio jewelry is. Some artists have already begun to do that, but there's very little critical documentation or alternate exposure. The level of writing has not been very stringent or demanding – or even there. And when it is, we must ask, who does it reach? I would say the majority of museum directors and gallery owners still consider jewelry a vain activity.

Trapp: When "Jewelry USA" toured, back in 1985, there was no substantial publication accompanying it. Here was a major exhibition of jewelry, yet we had no written interpretation of the material, no rigorous analysis. There was no discussion of the work's content. But maybe the questions is, why should there be? Quite frankly, maybe the question is, how can we talk about something that's not there? It's a young field – maybe there's no content to talk about. Now, if the artists disagree, I say they need to step forward and explain their work. I know that many artists hear that and think, "Oh, God, it's all I can do to make my work, let alone promote it." But you can't just rely on the critics. Most people don't read, anyway. You can't just rely on the museums and the galleries. Everyone in the field has to work in tandem. You need galleries, you need museums, you need publishers, you need collectors, but you also need artists who actively participate.

Friedlich: What else can the field do to engage the interest of curators and the so-called fine arts community?

Cummins: Perhaps it has something to do with the West Coast's tendency to accept unusual ideas, but I don't think anyone coming into my gallery finds it difficult to accept jewelry as an art form. I haven't very much experience dealing with East Coast museums, but I believe they are collecting jewelry in the decorative art departments. They may not be collecting contemporary jewelry, but I don't think museums are expected to be the forerunners of popular opinion. Jewelry collections will begin with older work and holloware. Eventually, curators will realize that the work of contemporary jewelers is very much related to the work of jewelry's great masters. The continuum is clear to me and curators will come to see it, too.

Trapp: One thing I've discovered is that there's a greater chance that I'll go to see an artist's studio if the artist contacts me. It's so much easier for me if I don't have to find out an artist's name, where the artist lives, the telephone number. You've got to remember that curators are inundated, and, like our public education systems, our funds are being cut back.

Friedlich: Ken, could you give us the curatorial perspective on all this?

Trapp: Your question assumes that there is one curatorial sensibility out there, but in fact it's a very diverse field. There are many kinds of curators of decorative art. Some deal with only ceramics and others with only glass. Some deal with American work, others with European. And then, you have no idea of what we're talking about. They probably have no idea there's a contemporary jewelry movement. And among those who are working with contemporary craft, their interest is generally in furniture, glass, ceramics...the biggies. Unfortunately, in the hierarchy of craft, jewelry seems to fall low.

In my case, I work with both historical and contemporary decorative art. About three years ago, I decided to choose a medium and collect it as actively as I could and I chose metal. We've been able to acquire wonderful work by Californian jewelers such as D. X. Ross, Sandra Enterline, Christina Smith, Susan Kingsley and Joyce Clements. We already have the Margaret DePatta collection here. So one way I can justify collecting jewelry is to say, "We have a superb collection that was given as a core collection. Let's now build upon it."

But I have to fight the same attitudes as you. Right now, I want to make three jewelry purchases amounting to maybe $8,000. You wouldn't believe what I have to go through...or maybe you would. I have to keep justifying why I want the work, and the answer I keep getting is not yes or no, but maybe. I can deal with yes or no. I can't deal with maybe. It makes me feel very inadequate and frustrated. And the people in the field look at me and wonder why I can't be more effectual. Well, it's because I'm dealing with the same stereotypical precepts as everyone else. If I could have just $5,000 a year – that's not much is it? – I could develop a substantial collection. Fortunately for the museum – and unfortunately for the artist – the cost of excellent jewelry is very reasonable.

Friedlich: What steps should the field take to engage the interest of existing and potential collectors?

Cummins: There has been far too little attention paid to collectors. Last year, in connection with a group show of prominent American jewelers, my gallery arranged for speakers to address local collectors. Events like this allow people to see themselves as members of a social group that discusses and looks at jewelry. Part of the appeal of collecting is the social aspect, the exchange of information, the sharing of enthusiasms. Without that structure, many people don't even perceive themselves as collectors.

Grotta: I enjoy the experience of visiting galleries and museums with groups of collectors. There seems to be a collective energy that sustains everyone, gets us all through a long day packed on a bus. And I've been exposed to wonderful work through my trips with the Collectors Circle of the American Craft Museum In particular, I think of Helen Drutt's show at the Philadelphia Museum and the phenomenal jewelry collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Friedlich: My questions have assumed that there is value in pursuing the outside world. Should we be courting its enthusiasm and support? Or should we just do our work?

Bennett: Our first obligation is to our investigation, our inquiry. We should avoid rushing to the marketplace; we have a lot to deal with among ourselves first – some maturing would not hurt. By outside, I mean understanding what model we want to use as a guide, in what context we want our work seen. How do all the components – the gallery director, curator, publisher, critic, collector and ourselves – everyone who affects our work, communicate, and what is the quality of that communication?

Trapp: There comes a time when you have to stand up and say, "I don't care what you think of me, this is right, this is how I want to see it. If you're not going to be with me, that's fine but I have to move."

Gralnick: People should be focusing more on their work and less on gaining acceptance for the field. But, of course, that goes against what we've all been taught because it means we're rejecting the status and money that can accompany acceptance. We've been raised in a society that says there's something wrong with you if you're not rich and famous by the time you're 35. Americans don't see the positive side of struggling and being on the outside. That's unfortunate because being an outsider is what keeps you pushing and stretching and saying, "What the hell am I going to come up with next?"

Certainly, from a gallery's point of view, the art world's hostility to the field is a negative factor. It's certainly not going to have a favorable impact on sales. But it's not a negative to me. I'm not so sure I'm ready to see the art world absorb jewelry at this point. I think jewelry has some places to go first. In fact, I take some pleasure in the art world's refusal to accept jewelry. There's a freedom in it.

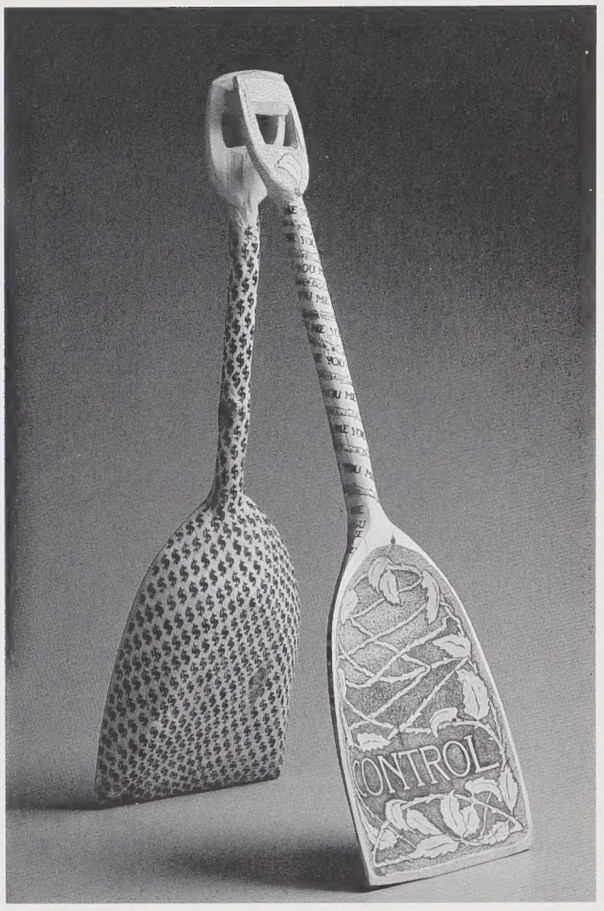
You know what I think this field really needs? More people willing to stick their necks out. People like Thomas Gentille. He's a real inspiration to me. Here's this person who's been out there for God knows – 25 years – doing what he's doing with no compromise for the sake of having that VCR and microwave and fancy car.

People are constantly saying to me, "Lisa – why don't you give up on jewelry and just make sculpture? Then you could make the forms you want to make and sell them for a lot of money and no one will question the price." As soon as someone says that to me, it's just more fuel for my fire.

Probably the major reason I continue to make jewelry is because it's still an out there kind of field. It's so fucking hard. And I like that.

Donald Friedlich is an artist who makes jewelry. Judith Mitchell is a writer who wears it. They live together in Providence, Rhode Island.

Reviews



Devices for Measuring Obscenity
linden wood, pyrography
34½ x 11 x 12", 1990
Collection: Karen Johnson Boyd, Racine, WI

Material Culture
Jan Brooks Loyd

Ariel Gallery, Atlanta, GA
March 1 – April 16, 1991

by David Butler

Throughout the 80s, Jan Brooks Loyd made lyrical, gestural vessels out of forged steel. These beautiful bowls were dealing with form, line, shape and other formal concerns. No less beautiful but certainly more mysterious is her most recent work shown at Ariel Gallery. The bowl has given way to the shovel and along the way she has added a strong political and moral message to these wooded sculptures. The handcarved linden shovels with roses, vines and other objects artfully burned into the wood, create visually arresting, thought-provoking objects.

In *Devices for Measuring Obscenity,* two shovels stand handle to handle, balancing each other in an upright position. On one shovel, the word greed is burned into the scoop. On the other shovel, control is burned into it. Loyd creates a statement on greed and that perhaps greed is control out of control. The message seems clear enough, yet why are shovels used as measuring devices of obscenity?

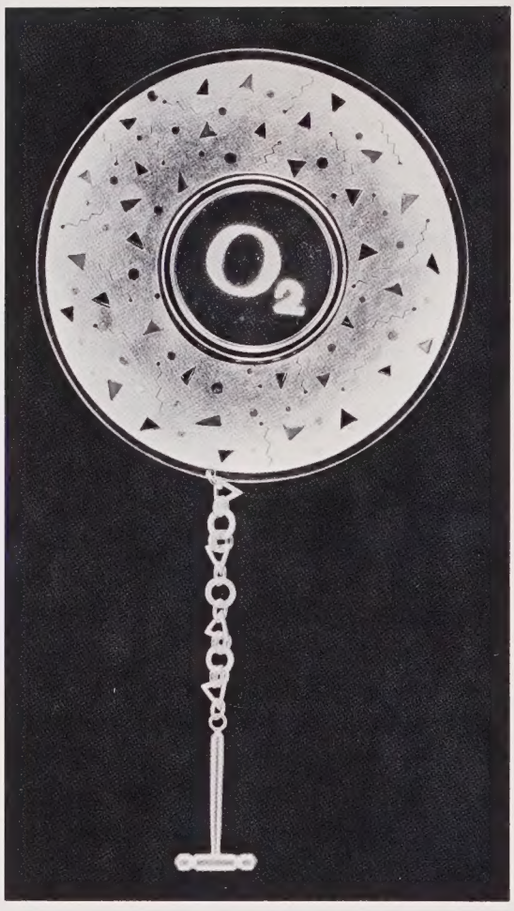
With the piece *Devices for Mapping Cultural Nostalgia,* the mysterious use of shovels continue. On one shovel, faithfully rendered roses rise behind the word "Faith." On the other shovel, two hands are reaching for a map-direction indicator. "Locus" has been burned into this scoop. Is the artist asking if faith is a nostalgic notion in the 90s? Does one really need a moral compass to guide one's life?

Why shovels? Shovels are associated with hard work, sweat, toil, construction and, of course, digging. I know that when mixing concrete, a shovel is perfect for measuring the right amount of sand to gravel, but is it an appropriate device to measure obscenity? Can one really use a shovel on an abstract idea like cultural nostalgia?

A third shovel sculpture gives us a glimpse that perhaps the artist recognizes her idiosyncratic tendency. In *Taste Fracture,* a wooden shovel has been covered with copper and brass foil. Interspersed among the metal sheets are newspaper and magazine clippings, almost collagelike. A meter stick balances this shovel in an upright position. Whereas her other works are very symmetrical, this one looks off balance, by any measure.

Perhaps keeping the viewer off balance is one of Jan Books Loyd's goals here. The sculptures are on the one hand visually accessible and on the other, conceptually enigmatic. There needs to be more resolution between the objects and the words on the objects. Despite the fact that I don't really understand these works, I like them, and I hope she will keep digging in this vein.

David Butler is a jeweler living in Atlanta.



Far left
Joy Pennick (Nova Scotia), *Rings*, from top left: *Endangered Species (Souvenir)*, sterling silver, rosewood; *Foundations (Urban Resource)*, steel, slate; *Petrified (Wood)*, sterling silver, copper; *Mineral Rights (Aerial View)*, retriculated sterling silver, fabricated, 2.5 x 2.5 x 3.5cm. Photo: Jeremy Jones

Left
Ann L. Lumsden (Ontario), *In Case of Emergency...Brooch*, sterling silver, nickel silver, 24k gold-plated brass, niobium, watch crystal, ceremit, roller embossed, domed, engraved, plated, cast, sandblasted, anodized, 7.5cm d. Photo: Jeremy Jones

The Medium is Metal The Focus is Resources

Ashtons, Toronto, Ontario
May 4 – 25, 1991

by Susan Wakefield

The call for entries of the Metal Arts Guild's annual juried show stated "The focus is resources, your interpretation," and then, "We encourage you to submit whatever you are currently creating."

The show echoed this ambiguous premise. Size and scale of work were conservative but most pieces were technically well-executed, some inspired. Resources were interpreted via recycled objects, reused material, such as rubber, records, nails, pine needles, leather, bark, wood, broken glass, broomstraws, coconut shell, tin cans and foil wrappings, as well as more conventional precious and nonprecious metals and stones. Often the theme was apparent only in the title.

Ann L. Lumsden's award-winning pin (the Steel Trophy Award – "Best in Show") made good use of design and material. *In Case of Emergency* and resembling a balloon with tail trailing, this pin was simple and elegant. The simplicity was belied upon closer inspection by a long list of materials and involved processes such as roller-embossing, engraving, plating, cast, sand-blasting and anodizing – not all of which are easily identifiable. The center of the "balloon" carries the message "O_2" under a watch crystal.

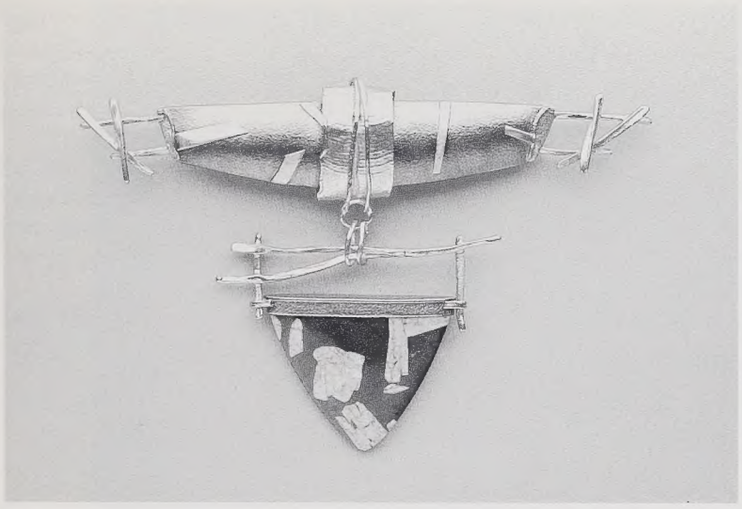
From Alberta came a charming piece with a somewhat ominous message in the title by Glenda Rowley. Whimsy and playfulness express themselves in a kaleidoscope of refracted light with constellations and weightless people floating around the handpiece. Balanced on its own stand of three springy legs on pointed feet, it is about to leap into space. Titled *The Last Frontier*, it offers both challenge and threat – have we lost already?

Ene Kivilo of Ontario brought us back to earth with her four pins called *Medals of Honor – Clear Rain, Pure Water, Green Forest, and Clean Air.* Her forms are both geometric and naturalistic. The colors (black and silver) are clean and austere with abstract line images of inlaid silver in "ribbons" of black acrylic. The "medal" utilizies wave, mountain and cloud, while at the base are silver abstract "fringes" that symbolize hope.

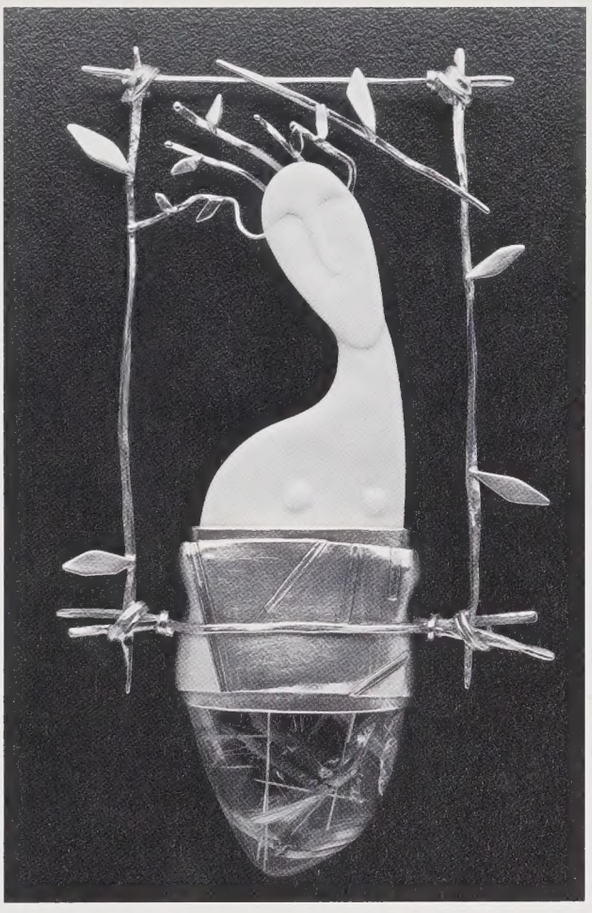
This year's student award went to Joy Pennick of Nova Scotia for her four rings – circular with straight tops, or squared with inserted. The discs are either rosewood (*Souvenir*), slate (*Foundations – Urban Resource*), silver with copper overlay (*Petrified – Wood*) and reticulated silver (*Mineral Rights – Aerial View*). Someone was heard to say (".....just when you think you have seen a ring done every way possible..." which expressed the general reaction to these rings. Clean in concept, fun to wear, they are delightful.

The show had a high level of workmanship and some excellent design but did not create a strong statement overall. Perhaps a stronger "call" would have pulled it together into a cohesive whole.

Susan Wakefield is a metalsmith practicing in Canada, who runs a company called AlumColor Plus.



Brooch, sterling silver, 18k gold, Chinese writing stone, 3½ x 3", 1989



Daphne's Metamorphosis Brooch, sterling silver, 18k gold, bone, quartz, 3 x 1¾", 1990

Carolyn Morris Bach

Sculpture to Wear, Los Angeles, CA
January 19 – February 15, 1991

by Carolyn Novin

Carolyn Morris Bach, in the manner of a shaman, uses her powers to amplify human awareness. While following basic processes and materials to make beautiful jewelry, she doesn't produce work of pristine refinement; she eschews highly polished finishes and elaborately cut gems for surfaces that reflect exposure to time and wear. Silver and 18k gold are softly burnished, with bright highlights. Bach favors pearls and stones with intrinsic interest such as opal, tourmalinated quartz, Chinese writing stone and Japanese river rock.

Wrapping, typing, bezel-setting, looping, overlay – fabricating techniques are straightforward, obvious, and so gracefully achieved that they, along with metals and stones, are *elements-vitale* of each object. Considerable visual interest derives from varying line width, positive and negative space, gesture and movement.

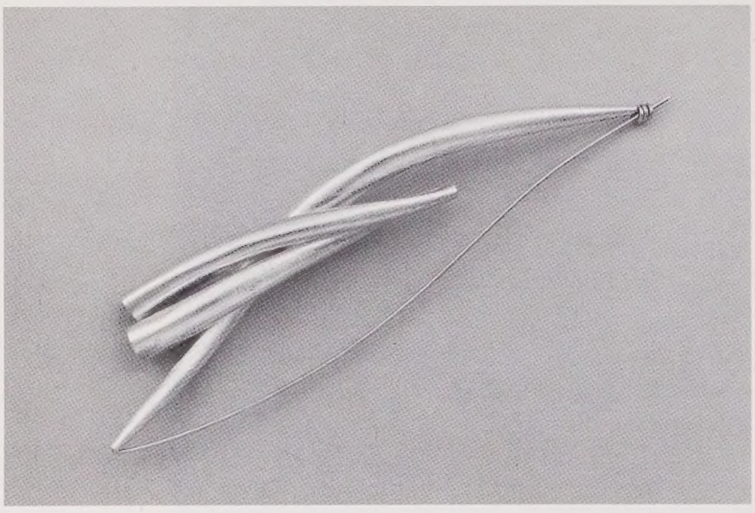
Bach's forms are always organic, sometimes figurative, usually anthropomorphic. Asymmetrical units are joined in balanced composition. For example, in a particularly striking brooch, a smoothed Chinese writing stone and fabricated gold/silver pod – bead sustain a duet of complementary pattern and shape across a golden lattice.

In another brooch, a Tahitian pearl, carved bone figure and gold/silver tree recall sea-earth-sky linkage. As she uses these components, Bach preserves their characteristic qualities; she doesn't translate a leaf into metal but uses metal to make a leaflike shape. That each material retains its identity and joins harmoniously within an anthropomorphic object proclaims human reconciliation with all of nature – an important palliative for the alienating forces in contemporary life.

Bach's most recent jewelry refers to the ancient Greek story of Daphne who metamorphosed to escape Apollo's amorous pursuit. Tremendous energy meets terrific restraint at the moment of Daphne's transformation from nymph to laurel tree. Thrusting branches enclose the nymph, whose hair even flees skyward as leafing twigs. While they represent the desire to elude rather than actively to solve a problem, these brooches and necklaces also depict the moment where rebirth mandates loss of the familiar along with embrace of the new.

In this show of necklaces, brooches, earrings and sculpture, back designs economically, often using line, not form, and trusting simpler imagery to capture the defining essentials of her ideas. She continues to display an intense intimacy with her work and a unique sensitivity to combinations, compounding effects as she layers metals, as naturally as leaves spread upon a forest floor.

Carolyn Novin is a metalsmith and writer living in Los Angeles.



Brooch, sterling silver, 14k gold, 5¾ x 1½ x ⅝"

Necklace, sterling silver, 5½ x 2 x 1"

Cathryn Vandenbrink

Concepts, Carmel, CA
October 5 – 31, 1990

by Dawn Nakanishi

Dynamic, sculptural, inventive are a few of the adjectives that would describe Vandenbrink's jewelry. Her work is based on the hollow double-ended spiculum. While many have utilized this form in making minimal jewelry, Vandenbrink has truly explored its decorative potential. She manipulates the curvature as a counterpoint to secondary hollow-tapered tubes. These sensual elements weave and "swim" together as if floating in space. The forms are usually in silver or a combination of silver and gold. The surface has a hint of roller-printed texture and is given a matte finish.

Function has been carefully engineered into the design. All the spicula are very light and wearable. I would call her brooches "fibulae" because their pin stem is a compositional element of the piece. The pin stem fastens the fibula by tucking neatly into an overlapping seam. There are no unnecessary findings on the brooches and spare use of solder.

Her neckpieces, or more aptly "neck laces," are larger, plumper, double-ended spicula attached to a long, commercially made snake chain. They act somewhat like plumb bobs, one on each end of the chain. The necklace is designed to be tied by looping the snake chain. The loop can be positioned near or below the sternum on the wearer. The double-ended spicula fall at about waist level. The interaction of the spicula and the saucer change, depending on how the piece is tied. Wearers have the unusual freedom to choose how they wish to wear this neckpiece in a variety of compositions. These pieces have a pleasing sound as the metal elements gently move against each other on the body. The simple forms, movement and sound are reminiscent of sculptures by Harry Bertoia and Alexander Calder. I associate these works with interactive sculpture to wear, rather than pure adornment.

Vandenbrink makes two versions of this "neck lace" design. One is in silver with the brushed white-silver finish and the other in copper with a torch-colored black and earthy red magenta. Though both are the same design, the colors change the attitude of the pieces dramatically. The red and black strongly align themselves with organic and natural sensibilities. Their forms and earthy color suggest a primitive quality without crudeness. They also intimate a mysterious character absent from their silver counterparts.

In her copper "fibulae" (earrings and necklaces), wires move and act like black pine needles, and the snake chains are patinated black. The pieces hint at being talismanic or fetishlike without representational clichés. The fibulae consist of one double-ended spiculum rather than two or three intertwined. They tend to be bolder and more powerful because of their size and color. They do not have the lyrical compositional feel of the silver and gold pieces.

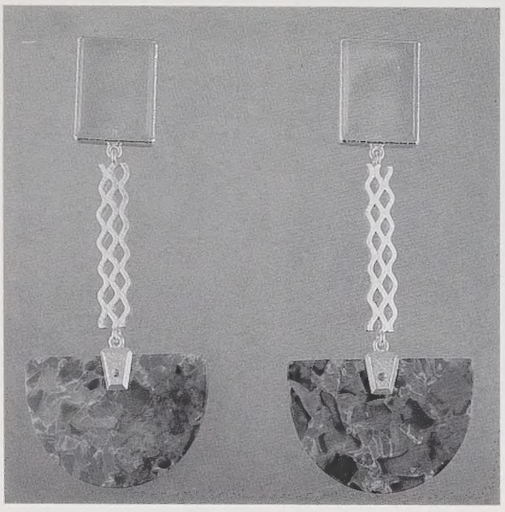
Aside from pleasing form, the work has many other intriguing qualities: sound, movement, an unstructured flexibility and a delightful toylike quality. Earlier pieces had moving parts and intriguing shapes to touch and rattle; so, from viewing the current works, it is clear that she is continuing a successful progression.

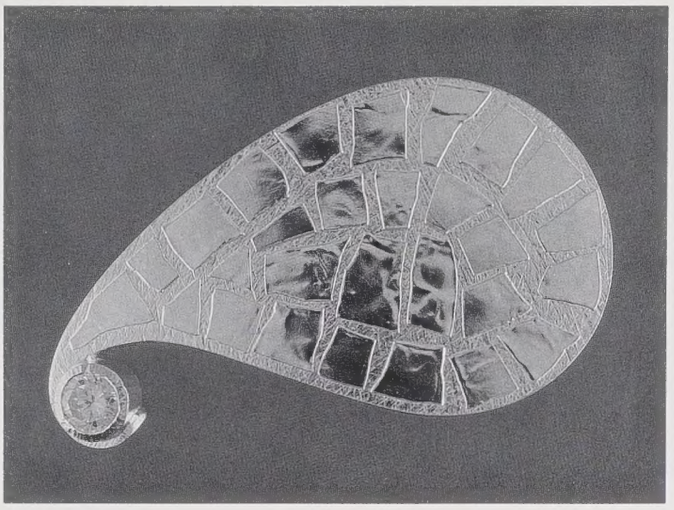
Dawn Nakanishi is an artist and instructor of Metal Arts and Jewelry at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.

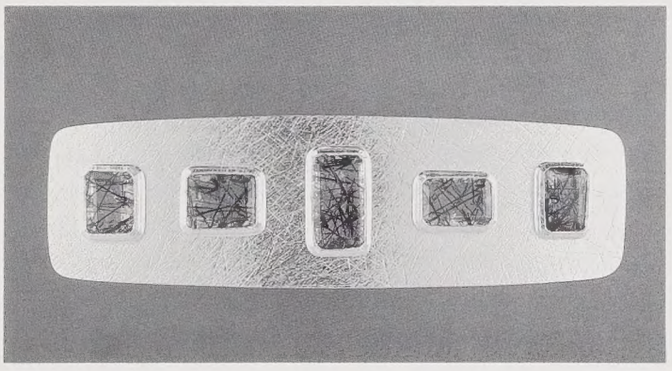
Right
Earrings, sterling silver, moonstones, sardagate dangles, 1991

Far right
Paisley Pin, sterling silver, 22k foil mosaic, cubic zircon, 1991

Below right
Lozenge Pin, sterling silver, tourmalinated quartz, 1991







Steven Brixner

Gallery Eight, La Jolla, CA
May 4 – June 8, 1991

by Janice Keaffaber

Understated and elegant traditional shapes – circles, triangles, squares, rectangles and half-rounds – formed the basis of Steven Brixner's exhibition. The geometric forms of the 37 pieces were pushed to near mathematical precision, then transformed with a classical approach of softened angles and curved planes.

Surface treatments often include a subtle, file-textured finish, accenting the dense strength of the metal. Meticulously placed stones, rather than serving as a focal point, complete the esthetic. The inclusion of cubic zircon in many of the works adds a flash of light and increases the appearance of preciousness.

Multiple variations of "dangle earrings" use loosely hanging ripple-chains to connect two geometric elements and add movement. Brixner creates the individual parts and then puts them together into combinations of contrasting shapes. The top element is often a sterling or gold-plated sterling, circular disc. Attention is paid to the surface with texture or with the addition of tactile patterns of minute squares or triangles of gold. Smooth slices of stone, including agate, quartz crystal or red jasper, swing freely below.

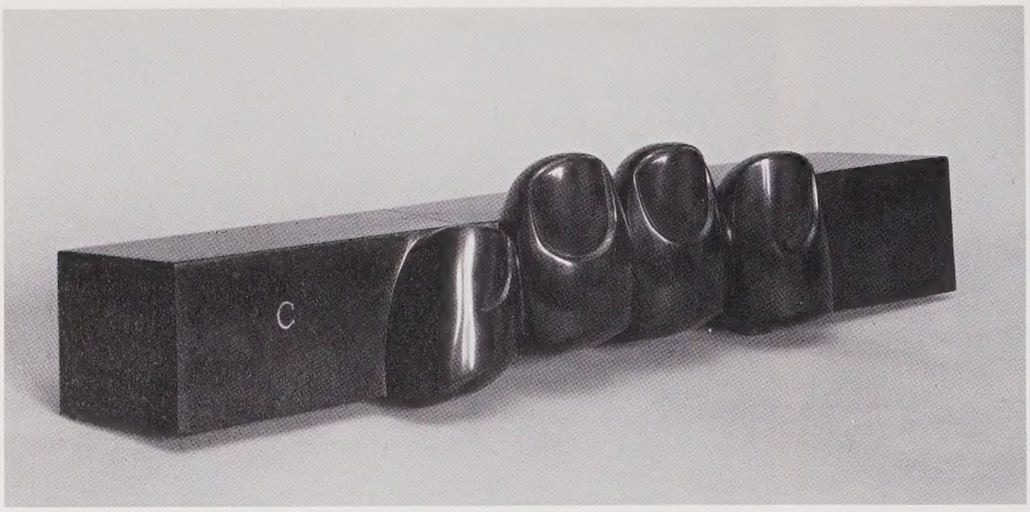
Two necklaces emphasize the circle shape in distinctive variations. In one, file-textured silver discs alternate with carnelian twist beads, giving an interesting juxtaposition of color and surface. The other presents a more formal study of 14 large sterling circles, spaced with small, 14k-gold, solid, round links.

A set of "lozenge pins" uses rectangles and squares, slightly curved with smoothly rounded corners. The gold-plated sterling has again been file-finished, creating a textured surround for faceted, clear-quartz stones, which are highlighted with sharp needles of tourmaline running through them in finely abstract linear patterns. The stones pierce the metal, adding light as an additional interplay in the composition.

The "paisley pin" series departs slightly from the geometric concept. Here the triangle form is coaxed into a graceful curve. In each piece, a cubic zircon rounds out the apex of the point, injecting balance into the design. Surface treatment varies. In some, 22k foil forms a gold-mosaic pattern across the piece, spaced to reveal precise glimpses of the underlying sterling. Other pins in the series incorporate multiple stones of garnet, onyx, tourmaline, topaz or amethyst in restrained compositions. The most successful brooch of this group uses a file-textured sterling background to emphasize the color of three tear-shaped turquoise stones. The shape of the stones, channel-set in 22k gold, relate to the outer curve of the piece and are offset by two small rounds of cubic zircon. Three additional brooches repeat the geometric embellishment seen in the earrings, with gold confettilike shapes sprinkled across the surface.

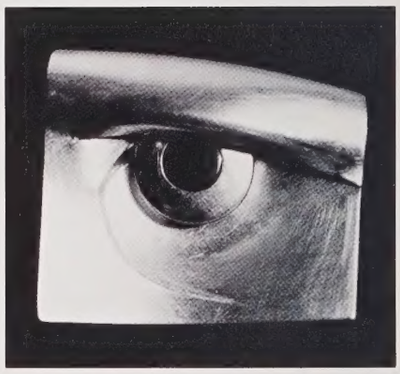
Brixner consistently references geometry, either in actual form or surface treatment, giving a clean sculptural quality to the work. There is also a thoughtfulness of execution, with consideration to how pieces will feel and look on the body. This is jewelry designed to be worn.

Janice Keaffaber is a writer and enamelist living in San Diego.



Left
"Misura," Measurement, black marble, 24 x 105 x 20 cm, 1990

Below
Eye Brooch, 20k gold, 3.5 x 4.2 cm



Bruno Martinazzi

Helen Drutt Gallery, New York/ Philadelphia
October 11 – November 3, 1990

by Michael Dunas

Bruno Martinazzi, one of a number of post-war European artists who achieved prominence in both jewelry and sculpture, continues to work in both disciplines and to benefit from showing them together.

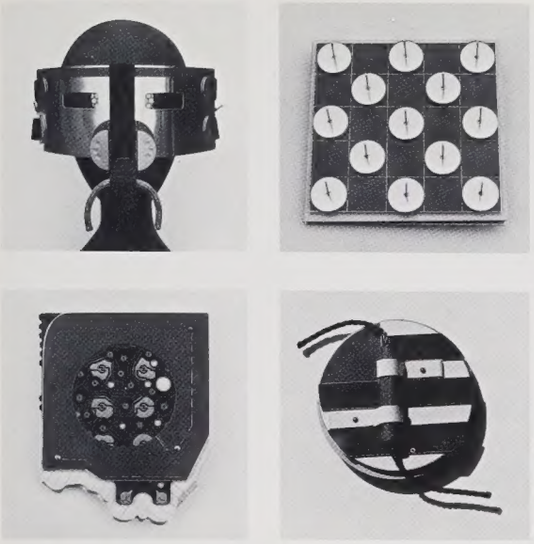
The stark, brooding anatomies, with which Martinazzi's work is often identified, first appeared in the 1960s. Using a timely Pop strategy, he isolated body parts to dramatize the human dimension of social issue. As though daily existence warranted a grotesque magnification to reveal the power of ordinary gestures, Martinazzi's clenched fist or accusatory finger was enlarged to sculptural icon, stunning in its sheer power of simple, direct body language. Likewise, his lip and belly brooches, diminished to the compact form of a fetish, had their own social magnitude as a symbol of the unconscious drive to project sexual power beyond physical intimacy.

In this show, which featured gold jewelry and tabletop marble sculpture from the last two decades. Martinazzi's strategy to render naked the relationship of social action with intimate feelings of love, hate and fear lost a great deal of its poignancy. Since the 60s, images of the body have become a battleground of socio-political agendas in art, coloring any subsequent figural representation with the blush of ideology. Martinazzi's precise, bloodless material handling of classic anatomies once appeared trenchant but now merely seemed locked into the past, oblivious to issues of homosexuality, gender, ethnicity, class, commodity, currently associated with this type of subject matter. Regrettably, as much a result of the changing climate in art as the social context of jewelry, these brooches and sculptures elicited a feeling of passive idolatry, nude rather than disturbingly naked. Once incisive badges of raised conscience, they now seemed merely recondite jewels and precious memorabilia.

The works in this show that rekindled an appreciation of Martinazzi's analytical wit were the sculptural facsimiles of scientific instruments of the type used for calibration and measurement. In these, his accurate lines and virtuosity of craft match his minimalist style, with an appropriately detached subject matter. The metaphor is one of shallowness, placid still lifes of commonplace instruments that coldly measure the depth of human understanding. As disarming examples of Pop's melancholic side, these works maintain a critical distance from everyday concerns, holding in abeyance any vexing judgments of cause and effect. The weights and measures, rendered with clear analysis, keen observation and the sure hand of material representation recast Martinazzi's role from alchemist and philosopher to stabilizing arbiter in a time of social confusion in art. And so, while his work in the past has been best described as a combination of the order of concepts and the chaos of sentiment, as the work of a scientific observer and impassioned advocate; for the time being, under current circumstances, the order of concepts has apparently prevailed.

Michael Dunas is a writer on craft and design.

A hard-cover, illustrated book *Martinazzi* with introduction by Paolo Fossati (in English) is available from Helen Drutt Gallery, 1721 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.



Clockwise from top left
Hopi Influence Mask, painted aluminum, aluminum mesh, cord, elastic, fabricated, engraved, 6" w., 1990; *Spike Brooch*, aluminum, stainless steel, fabricated, engraved, 2 x 2", 1990; *New American Smart Bomb Brooch*, painted aluminum, wood, string, fabricated, engraved, 3¼" d., 1990; *Electric Company Brooch*, painted aluminum, wood, string, fabricated, engraved, 2¼ x 2", 1989

David LaPlantz "Some New – Some Old Jewelry Metalsmithing"

Reese Bullen Gallery
Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA
March 6 – 23, 1991

by Kris Patzlaff

This comprehensive view of David LaPlantz's work from 1968 to the present included over 200 pieces, giving the viewer an insight into the work's technical and conceptual evolution. Containers, vessels and banks, constructed of brass and copper (1968–1978) were tucked away in deep shadow boxes. Tarnished and worn like artifacts or antiquities from the artist's attic, they reflected LaPlantz's statement: "I do not put much stock in what has happened, but rather what is happening today and the promise of tomorrow." Similarly presented were a series of banks constructed with coconut shells as the primary forms (1977-1980). Their black crinkle paint created a rich surface, which LaPlantz embellished with black grosgrain ribbon, folded and tacked with black nails and chain mail. These banks foreshadowed LaPlantz's use of armor, which became a constant thread throughout his work.

In the earlier years armor was used as a means of embellishment and construction, but later, it became a personal vision for the future as well as a metaphor for protection. Large, angular hair pieces, with long knitting needles as picks, had sharp edges hinting at weapons. *Spike Brooch* (1990), with protruding earring posts as elements, decisively kept huggers at a distance. *Stxyc's Mask* (1990), and *Slimline Facial Gear* (1990), suggested an interest in futuristic armor; masks for protection against harmful elements in our threatened environment.

Another form of protection was evident in the 150 brooches, displayed in a gridlike fashion within three large wall cases. These all were badges or insignias determining hierarchy within a social organization (they also reflected LaPlantz's philosophy of making "a piece a day"). *New American Smart Bomb* (1991) is a fabricated circle brooch of painted aluminum with a small section of blue at the top right side. The remainder of the circle has red and white stripes. Two of the white stripes hold a cylindrical piece of wood with a string emerging from each end, reminiscent of a stick of dynamite with two fuses. Lighting the second of the fuses is sure to cause this "bomb" to blow up in the igniter's face.

The major transition exposed here was the introduction of painted aluminum in 1980 and anodized aluminum in 1984. Aluminum allows LaPlantz to work spontaneously and quickly, exploring primarily a two-dimensional surface. Engraved, scribed lines and pierced layers of colored aluminum expose underlying colors, layers or other materials. Line is often used in perspective, creating optical illusions that imply three dimensions. More importantly, aluminum provides color, an element sparsely touched on previously.

Pieces from 1980 to 1986 are testimony to the intensity with which he explored color; they range from saturated and bold to translucent and soft. Works using narrow fields of color provided by painted aluminum have limited success. Lacking richness, range of hues and depth, many feel static compared to works incorporating anodized aluminum. LaPlantz capitalizes on the colors of anodized aluminum by taking advantage of its futuristic appeal within hard-edge, clean-line and graphic images. He also explores its unlikely use within organic shapes and forged surfaces, pushing it to function outside its most obvious composition. At times, the artist seems to use colors contrary to the intent of the work. For example, *Hopi Influence Mask* (1990) is a futuristic eye shield, primarily constructed of green aluminum. The historical reference implies ceremonial power or protection, neither of which are enhanced by this choice of color. Rather, this green is associated with a feeling of passivity and complacency. Although most of LaPlantz's pieces are not pioneering in the use of color, he exhibits a commitment to understand its potential voice and power.

LaPlantz's resourcefulness is reflected in his use of readily available shapes, from industrial extruded aluminum and knitting needles to found objects from the hardware store or Radio Shack. At times, these materials do not surpass their original intent, but more often, LaPlantz elevates pieces of colored electrical wire, plastic reflectors or an obscure piece of hardware to the status reserved for gems and precious metals. In *Electric Company Brooch* (1989), a piece of circuit board is as striking as a piece of mokume gane and much more appropriate.

One might question the inclusion of some pieces in this exhibition, due to the implication that they are all "monumental" or "great." Overall, the range did provide an honest and intimate account of transitions and developing ideas. This was a straightforward and unpretentious retrospective, much like the artist himself.

Kris Patzlaff is a jewelry artist and teacher living in Trinidad, CA.

Historical Sources, New Visions in Contemporary Metalsmithing

Memorial Art Gallery
of the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY
March 1 – April 7, 1991

by Ron Netsky

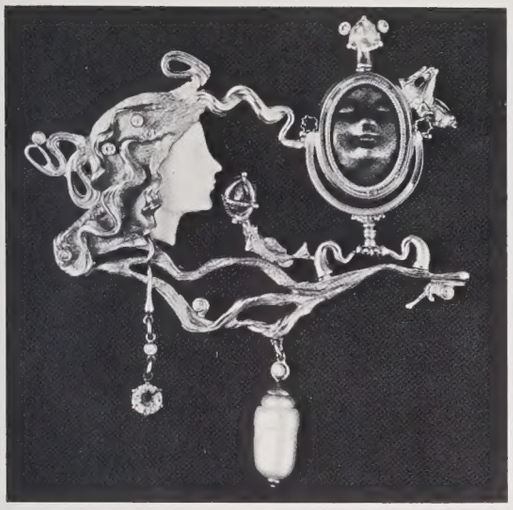
In metalsmithing, just as in other artistic media, work of the past plays an important role in the work of the present. Whether consciously or unconsciously, artists draw on previous work to enrich their technical and conceptual vocabulary. "Historical Sources, New Visions in Contemporary Metalsmithing" examined the importance of antecedents in a show of impressive quality. The exhibition, curated by Lynn Duggan, showcased the work of six metal artists. Alongside the work of each of the artists was a reproduction of a historical precursor, along with a cogent explanation of the relationship of past to present work.

The most unusual approach to metal in the exhibition was that of Tamiko Ferguson from New York City. Ferguson doesn't fabricate or solder nor use precious metals. Her material: safety pins; her technique: linking. But viewers would be wrong to assume that Ferguson's concepts are derived in any way from Duchamp's ready-mades or found-object sculpture. The origins can be found in chain mail in which iron or mild steel rings were linked together (four links through every one), and other garments from the 15th century. Ferguson's three pieces on display effectively showcased the breadth of possibilities of a medium most of us would not imagine beyond diaper-fastening. The most arresting of her pieces was *Black Sphere*, a seemingly infinite network of linked forms flowing endlessly into its core, while light catches the edges of the pins closest to the surface. *Black Sphere* conjured up a host of associations from the planetary to the microscopic, from natural sagebrush to man-made barbed wire.

Lucinda Brogden, from Rochester, updated the ancient technique of repoussé. While the method remains true to the 12th-century detail from a reliquary casket, reproduced here as an example, Brogden's subject matter is imbued with a lively, new wave, contemporary and surrealistic sensibility. In works such as *Telesedation, They're so much easier since the VCR*, metal is hammered into a wonderfully distorted view of bringing up children in the age of television. An armchair, floor lamp and television are far more animated than the children who crouch and sit before the screen, their heads having turned to televisions.

Johan Rhodes Update to 1989, by William Baran-Mickle from Rochester, goes beyond influence or historical precedent to the territory of satirical comment. The piece looked as if it began its esthetic life as a virtual copy of Johan Rhodes' *Silver Pitcher* of 1925, which is emblematic of pure-form Danish holloware. But Baran-Mickle has slashed the piece, inscribed it, added decorative squiggles to its surface and constructed a decidedly postmodern base and frame for his version. In adding this everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach to a symbol of purity, Baran-Mickle comments wryly on moving-target aspects of esthetic standards in the 20th century.

Humor was also an important ingredient in *New York Debutantes*, garmetlike creations of aluminum, plastic, steel wire, glass and beads by Debra Chase, from New York City, who seems to enjoy ridiculing the societal roles of the well-to-do. In each case a figure, dressed in the height of casual fashion, is suspended inside intricately crafted, wire-mesh, formal gowns.



Left to right

Melissa Chang, *Partner*, copper enamel, electroformed, 11¾" h., 1987

Lucinda Brogden, *Telesedation, They're So Much Easier Since the VCR*, chased bronze, pewter, slate, 18 x 17", 1988

Mark Stanitz, *Looking Glass*, enamel, ivory, pearl, diamonds, sapphires, citrine, 3¼ x 3¼", 1982

All of the accoutrements of the debutantes' lives – hairbrushes, mirrors, pocketbooks – float around the bodice and hem of the garments. If not for this exhibition it is doubtful that one would connect the works to an Egyptian bead-net dress 4,500 years old.

The work of Christopher Ellison, from Rochester, is formed and soldered employing traditional metalsmithing techniques. But the manner in which he pieces together the metal is more closely linked to techniques of basketry (here the examples are Japanese baskets). All of Ellison's pieces on display juxtaposed a copper green-blue patina on the lower, wider-banded sections with a rusted texture and color on the upper, more intricate sections.

The delicate forms of Mark Stanitz, from Rochester, are compared to the turn-of-the-century Art Nouveau pendant by René Lalique. In works like *Gold Spider*, combining gold, sterling, enamel and rhodochrosite, one could see a kinship in the tasteful use of diverse materials, organic shape and negative space.

Melisa Chang, from New York City, uses such modern techniques as electroforming to create paper-thin cups and vessels. In this case the works were compared not to other metalworks but to a raku tea bowl from the early Edo period. American Indian baskets were mentioned as another source of inspiration and it is to these that Chang is indebted for her bold pattern work on the vessels.

Ron Netsky chairs the art department at Nazareth College and is art critic for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

The Society of North American Goldsmith's Annual Conference

March 20 – 24, 1991
Atlanta, GA

by Keith A. Lewis

As always, the yearly conference of the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) demonstrated the profound and seemingly inescapable schizophrenia that lies at the heart of American metalsmithing. Faced with two poorly defined, but universally recognized paradigms: craft as art and craft as... well, craft, metalsmiths either carelessly pick sides or try to ignore the whole thing, hoping it will go away. Neither, of course, is a solution; and since so little serious thought is being addressed to the problem, a synthesis and understanding of the multiple goals that jewelry and metal can address remains always on the horizon.

Ostensibly, a professional conference should be an opportunity to present research, information and images and to engage in a healthy criticality. It should not be simply an opportunity to see friends, exchange tech-tips and receive each and every presentation with benign approval.

Numerous exhibitions and gallery tours were held in conjunction with the conference. These included the current Fortunoff Silver Show, at the new Atlanta International Museum of Art and Design, which showcased a number of exciting new works, as well as a few clunkers from the old guard, and an impressive show of William Harper's recent "Talismans for Our Time" at ArtSpace.

The talks, however, were more spotty than the shows and their varied quality was complicated by a lack of thematic unity in the topics. Several talks presented solid technical information, including a discussion of Dynalith EPR 5000 photoresist by Patricia Nelson and studio safety by Dr. Michael McCann. While generally informative, Dr. McCann's talk suffered from both excessive length and lack of specific information about hazards particular to metalsmithing.

A solidly researched presentation by Dr. Wolf Rudolph of Indiana University on "The Certomlyk Master" attempted to establish the hand of a specific metalsmith in several extraordinary objects produced in the Ukraine during the fourth century B.C. (see page 30 in this issue). In painful contrast, Dr. Duke Williams's discussion of "Contemporary West African Jewelry" turned out to be a rambling presentation of his own drawings and designs rather than an overview or study of the jewelry of that area.

Collection advisor Rosanne Raab gave an informative and thought-provoking presentation on the current status of collecting in the metals field. Her discouraging assessment of museum and collector interest was tempered by several interesting suggestions, including the possibility of a centralized national lending collection. A great disappointment was the cancellation of a discussion that was to have been conducted by Jan Brooks Loyd on the "possibilities that critical theory offers the crafts." This is the kind of assessment and challenge that our anemic and self-referential field desperately needs. *(continued next page)*

(SNAG Conference Review continued)

One of the great excitements of a SNAG conference is the opportunity to see and hear the heroes of the field, and at this year's conference three of them were asked to speak: Fred Fenster, Alma Eikerman and Albert Paley. All three, in their individual ways, have made invaluable contributions to the field.

Fenster, in a graceful blend of technical information and anecdote, presented a wide variety of pewter work, both his own and that of others. He managed to communicate a profound love of craft and material, and quietly and indirectly made a strong argument for traditional manifestations of craft.

Equally graceful was Alma Eikerman's long-awaited overview of her career as a teacher and metalsmith. One of the key figures in the postwar revival of American metalsmithing, Eikerman is known as an inspirational and dedicated teacher. She spoke of her studies in New York in the 30s and 40s where artists were "no longer bound to imitate nature" and were inventing "new ways to interpret visual reality." This commitment to ideological modernism was also demonstrated by slides of a remarkable body of work, spanning over 40 years. Despite its refutation by many current scholars, modernist theory still has enormous influence in the metals field, and a study of Eikerman's work and thought would contribute greatly to an understanding of its role. Her talk was given a warm and well-deserved standing ovation.

Impressive also was Albert Paley. Pushing past the size limits of jewelry early in his career, he took up blacksmithing. The attendant increase in scope has allowed him to produce large exuberant public works, which are unabashedly decorative, and based in form and gesture rather than ideology. Constantly expanding his technical range, Paley has managed to become enormously successful while maintaining integrity and honesty to his own vision. His talk, modest and thoughtful, discussed stylistic evolution, the search for "organic logic" and the use of ornament to enrich and explain structure. He spoke of the need to present oneself with daunting problems and to "make work a vehicle against the self."

In contrast, not the least bit modest was the talk by Robert Lee Morris. For some years it has been fashionable to cast Morris as the prodigal son and the great hope for the future of metalsmithing – ignoring the lack of quality and the derivative nature of most of his work. In his work, cultural expropriation, calculated "newness" and pseudosophistication place him well within the sexist, manipulative fashion world – a world that cares little for the meaning of craft. To my mind, looking to Morris for inspiration is a lot like high-diving into a birdbath: the shallowness gets in the way.

Are we so hard-up for heroes that we must flock to the adoration of someone who began his talk by telling us his income and ended it by advising us to make happy jewelry for the fall because we'll need "cheering up" after the Gulf War? In a dense and contradictory mix of five-and-dime zen, self-adulation ("my empire") and crass exploitation ("I'm always looking for the next angle"), he managed to elevate manipulation and hyperbole to new heights.

The revisionists look for excuses to admire him: "He paved the way for big jewelry"; and I ask, what about 1930s Bakelite, and our own Mary Lee Hu, Mary Ann Scherr and Arline Fisch? "He has gotten exposure for a lot of metalsmiths"; well, sure he has, but isn't a photo in *Elle* or *Vogue* a rather Faustian bargain? "He's shown it's possible to be successful, to make a living"; OK, so what about people who have kept their integrity and creativity and still been moderately successful, people such as Michael Good, Carrie Adell or Jan Yager, who seem to me to be production jewelers more worthy of our emulation and respect.

Morris spoke of being an "antenna of society," but we don't need antennas, we need beacons. We need people who embrace the exceptional, not the mediocre. We need people who aspire to quality and innovation, not to the almighty dollar. Morris is one tiny tin god whom we shouldn't bow to and whom we won't get respect for embracing. The standing ovation given him at the conference was an insult to metalsmithing, to notions of craft *and* of art and to the real heroes of our field who spoke before him.

Keith A. Lewis is a metalsmith, chemist and Gay/AIDS activist living in Ravenna, OH.

(Lettters continued from page 8)

Taking myriad things into account, I then reprocess the information I receive from the artist and from my experience with the work and try to arrive at some larger conclusions about what the artist is achieving in a milieu that is much larger than his/her own.

To me, "insight regarding the personal side of the maker or his or her own thoughts..." is a copout for the readership. It is easy information to get. I seek a challenge from the task of writing, and I seek to challenge my reader. And perhaps even more to the point, it has been my experience, and I think the history of art bears me out here, that artists very often do not have great insights about their own work. I love to talk with artists and I love to hear what they have to say, but, ultimately, it is most often the passionate and educated observer who can shed the brighter light.

As to Chuck Evans's comment about my "predictable style," he need only turn to my Peter Chang review in the same issue (page 45) to read how diverse my writing style can be. I suspect that what he meant to reference was (to his mind) my predictable content...which is ironic. Because what currently passes for critical writing in this field is truly the predictable (and what Evans is requesting!) – artist talking about technical, biographical or inspirational facts.

It may surprise Chuck Evans to know that every American artist I have written about, including Ted Muehling (whom he says deserves clear words), has opened our interviews by expressing the hope that mine won't be another "artist says" piece. Another artist confided to me, "I know where I've come from and what I think. I'd like to know what you think." That is exactly the kind of challenge that I try to meet.

It's very hard for me to respond to nonspecific complaints of art-jargon gibberish. I take pains to write clearly and my editor greatly assists me in that aim. My experience with this is two-fold. Metalsmiths who don't read about contemporary art accuse me of being "jargony." They have no familiarity with current art discourse and, thus, no yardstick for measuring the density of its vocabulary and nomenclature. Similarly, metalsmiths like Chuck Evans who are interested in reading about the personal process of art making and not the process of the art experience don't seem to know what I am saying. It becomes not an issue of language but of content.

Although I had little input on the controversial cover, except to encourage Muehling to submit Don Freeman's photos because he loved them, I might as well comment on that too! I understand from where some reader objections come, but I encourage readers to look beyond the notion that a photo must only be a record, or document. In describing Freeman's art to me Ted had said, "What I do in jewelry, he does in photography." I personally felt that the cover was mysterious and poetic, and very much a metaphor for the essential experience of Muehling's efforts. By the way, so did Ted. Readers would do well to compare Freeman's success at suggesting the veil of sensuality with the mass media photos used to illustrate Susan Kingsley's "Jewelry: It's Not a Pretty Picture" (*Metalsmith*, Summer 91). Talk about subtext. Uh-oh, better not; someone will accuse me of jargon-mongering!

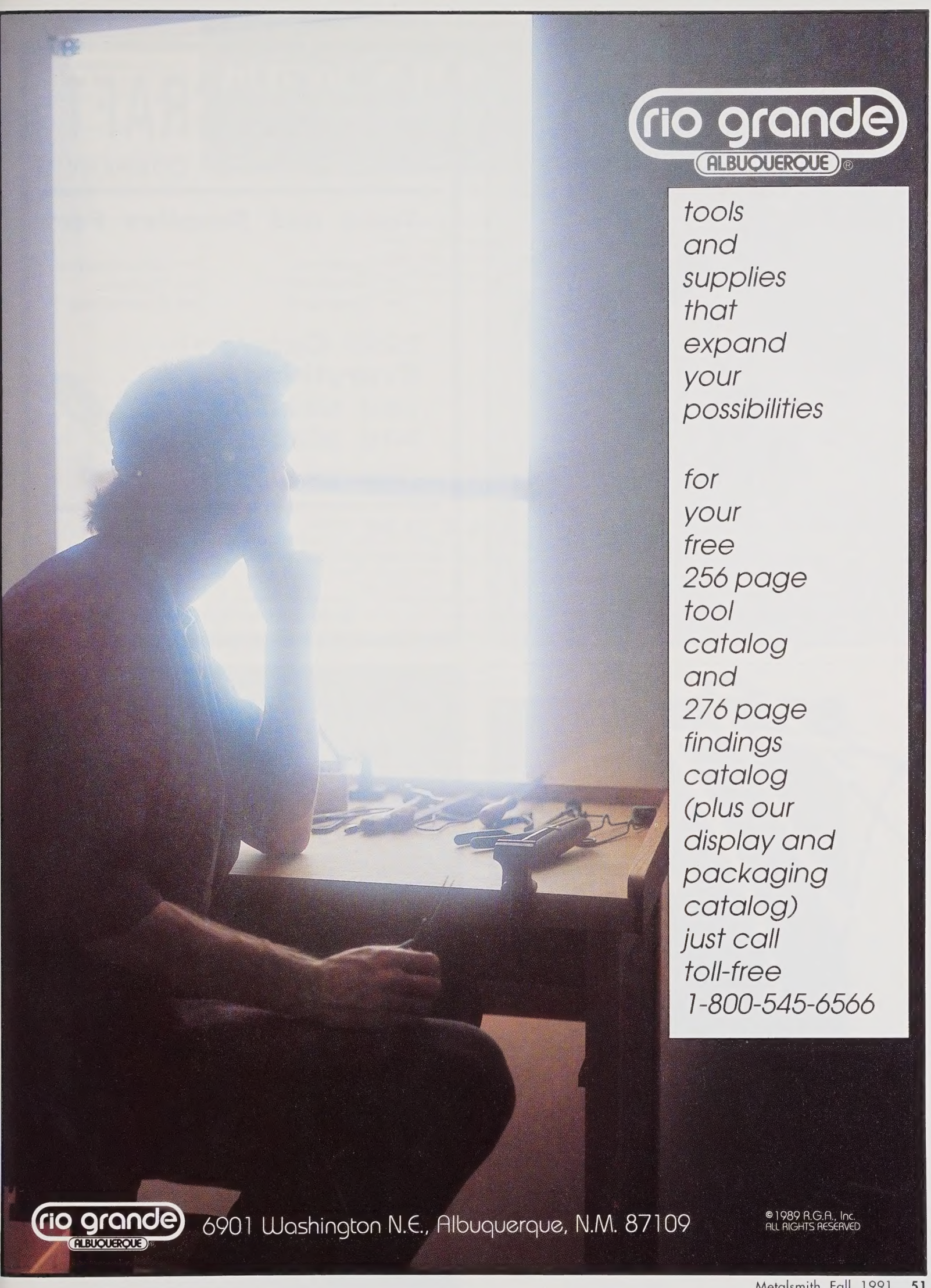
Vanessa S. Lynn, New York, NY

Dear Editor:

I want to congratulate you on your spring cover featuring the Ted Muehling *Pod Earring* photo. I thought it was the most beautiful ever. The imagery matches the magic of his work. Vanessa Lynn's story on Ted was long overdue, as he is one of the most brilliant jewelry designers of our time.

Ted's influence and contribution to the world of contemporary jewelry will be felt for may decades to come. It has been my pleasure to have exhibited his work since 1977.

Robert Lee Morris, Artwear, NYC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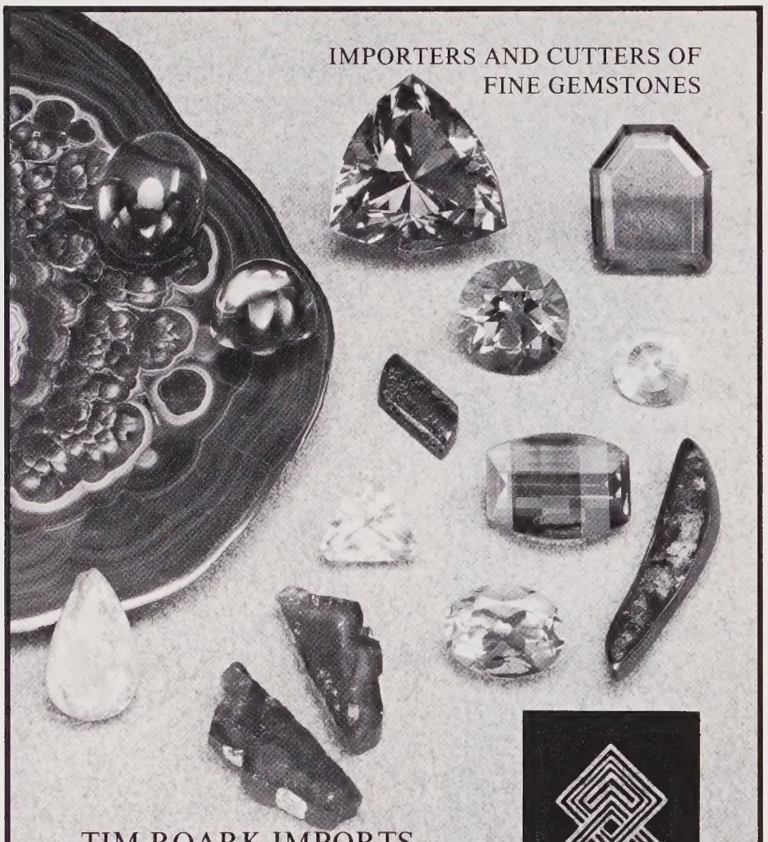

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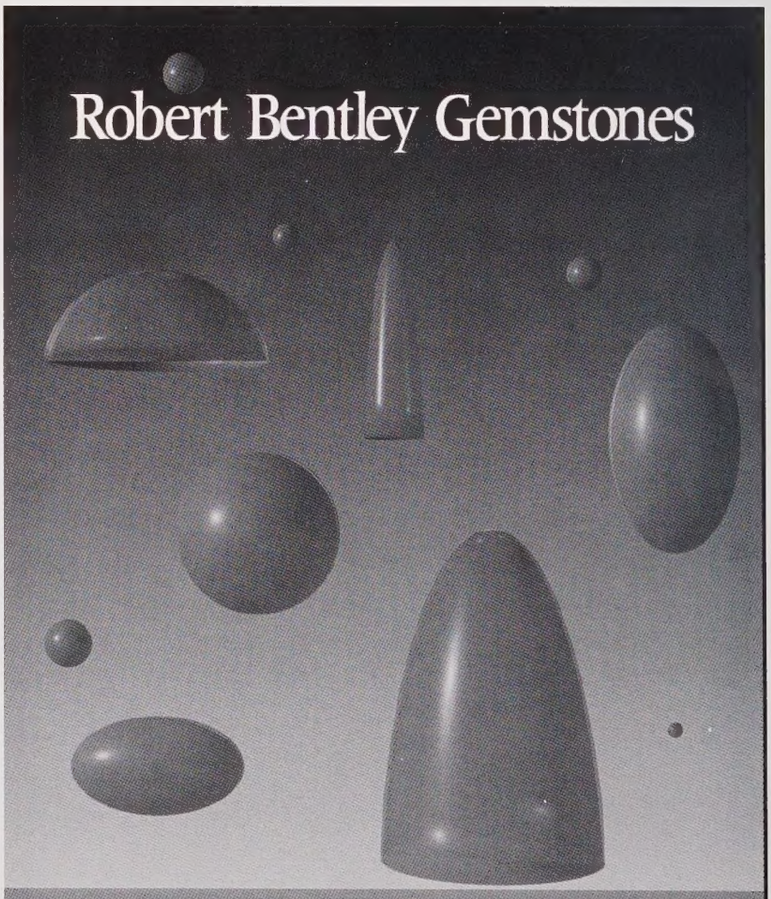

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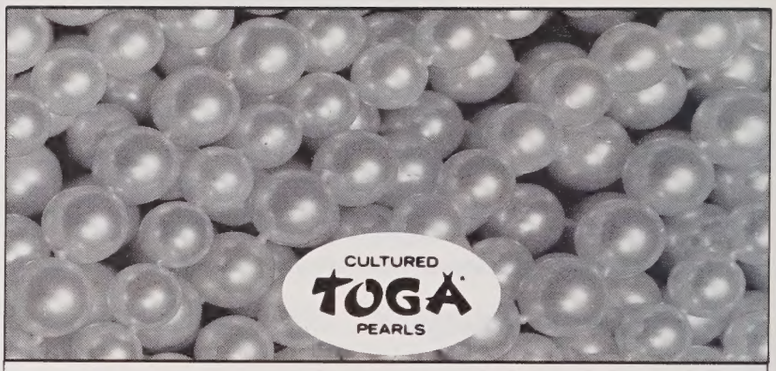

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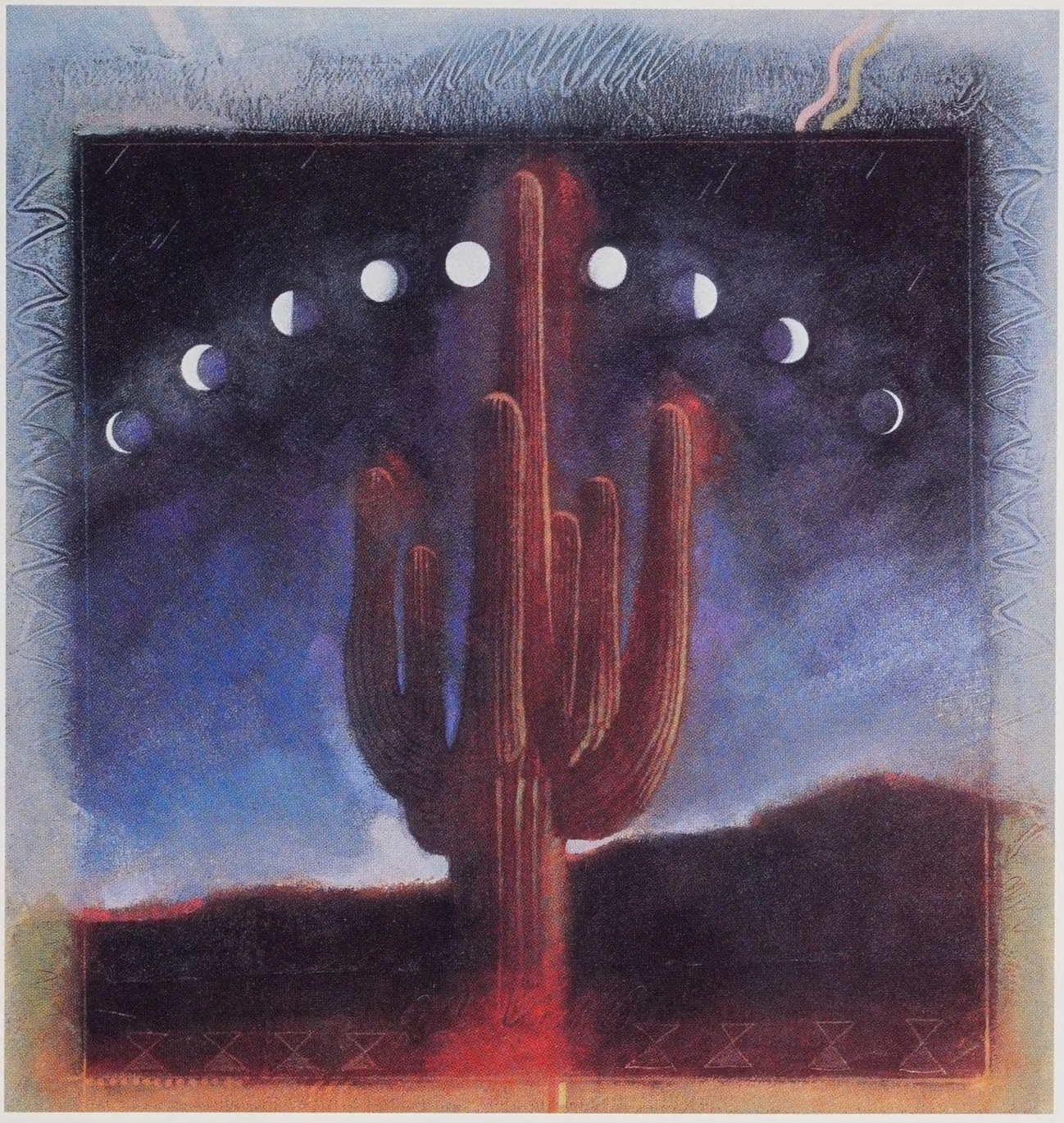

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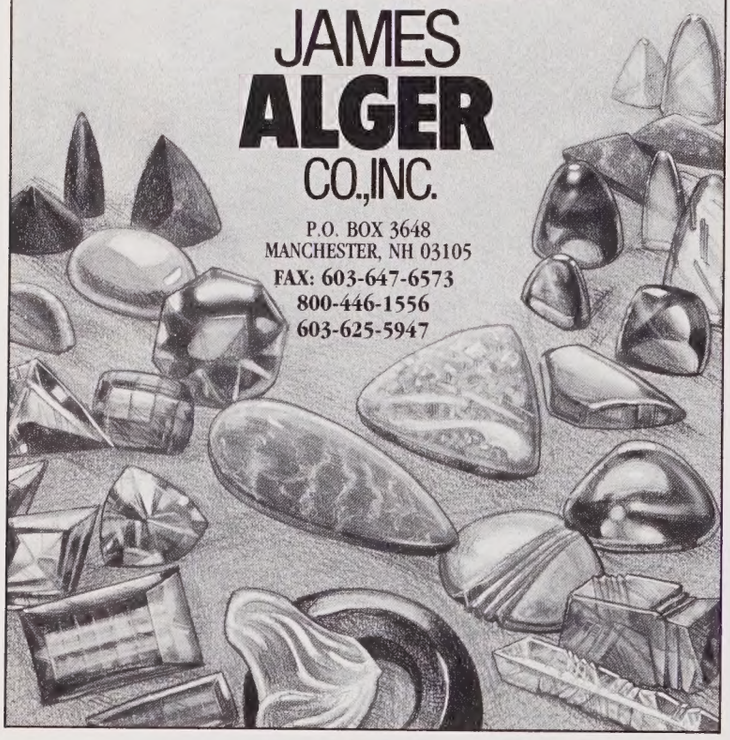

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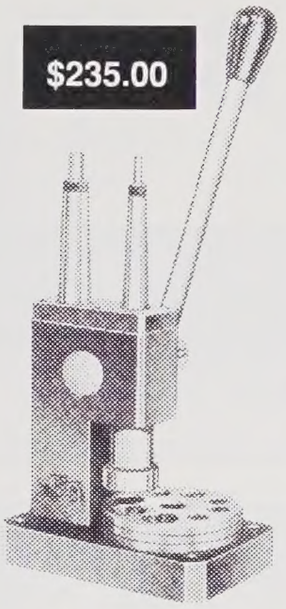

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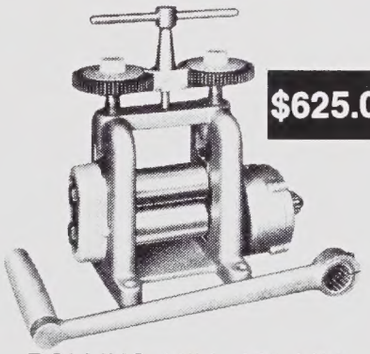

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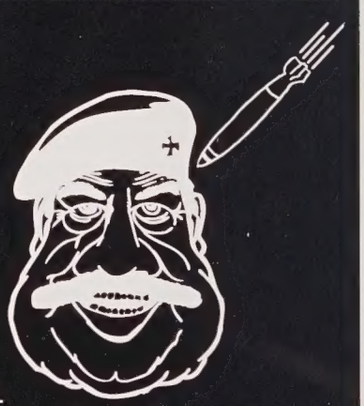

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INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Advanced Casting	56
Allcraft Tool & Supply Co.	52
American Gem Trade Assoc.	55
Anchor Tool & Supply Co.	61
Anne Hawken Gem Lab	52
Artwear	IFC
Atypic Gallery	5
Billanti Casting	60
Bonny Doon Engineering	13
Chicago Expo	53
Concepts	1
Creative Metalsmith	5
David Fell Co.	64
E.B. Fitler	58
Fortunoff Silver Competition	11
Frei & Borel	59, IBC
Gemstones	62
Helen Drutt	1
Hillock Anodizing, Inc.	63
James Alger Co.	56
J. Cotter Gallery	2
J.S. Ritter Jewelry Supply	56
Jewelerswerk Gallery	9
Jewelry Arts Inst.	13
Jett Gallery	2
John Henkel Casting	62
Larry Paul Casting	61
Met-L-Art	60
Miami Jewelry Inst.	7
Michael Good	BC
M/R Precious Metals Gallery	5
Myron Toback, Inc.	54
National Cast Products	58
Newall Mfg.	58
Penland	11
Perimeter	9
Precious Metals West	60
Progress Machine	57
Quadrum	1
Reactive Metals	54
Red Sky Plating	63
Revere Academy of Art	7
Rio Grande	51
Robert Bentley Gems	52
Ross Metals	64
Royal Findings	62
Sculpture to Wear	5
Sierra Casting	59
Southwest Crafts Center	13
Studio Jewelers	13
Susan Cummins Gallery	2
The Crafts Report	61
The Norman Thomas Co.	61
The Cargo Hold, Inc.	56
Tim Roark Imports	52
Toga	54
Winged Camel Metalworks	7
Worcester Crafts	13
Young Manufacturing	59

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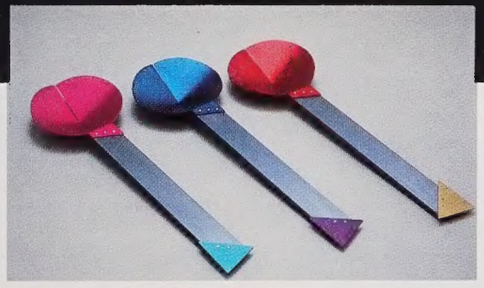

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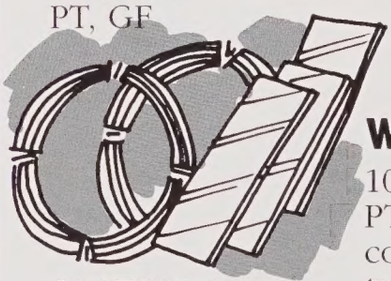

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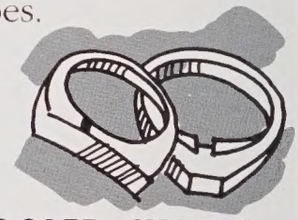

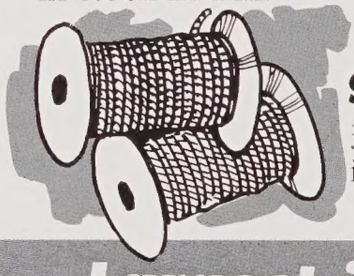

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The Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) was formed in 1970 to promote contemporary metalwork and jewelry. Through its publications, services and advocacy, SNAG serves the fine art and jewelry communities. SNAG's publications and conferences provide technical information and critical insight to practitioners and teachers of metalwork. Professional metalsmiths, students, collectors, gallery owners and enthusiasts make up the dynamic mix of the Society.

Services

The Society's annual conference provides a forum for the exchange of many points of view. Speakers of national recognition offer stimulating discourse on a range of topics. Members of the Society attend the conference at reduced rates.

The Society sponsors important exhibitions of contemporary metalwork. Past SNAG shows have been mounted at the Renwick Gallery, the St. Paul Museum of Art and several galleries in New York City. These exhibitions are usually restricted to members only.

The Society maintains an audio-visual library, which contains the portfolios of distinguished members and other notable metalsmiths. Members can rent slides, films and videotapes at a nominal cost.

The Society operates a discount book service, through which important texts on all aspects of the field can be ordered at a reduced price.

Publications

Metalsmith is the only magazine in America devoted solely to the metal arts. Please see the reverse side of this page for a detailed description of this exciting magazine. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Metalsmith.*

The *SNAG Newsletter* is published bimonthly and is available to members only. It features timely information on exhibitions, work-shops, conferences and job opportunities throughout North America.

Membership Categories

The Society offers several types of memberships, each tailored to a specific level of involvement in the field of contemporary metalsmithing.

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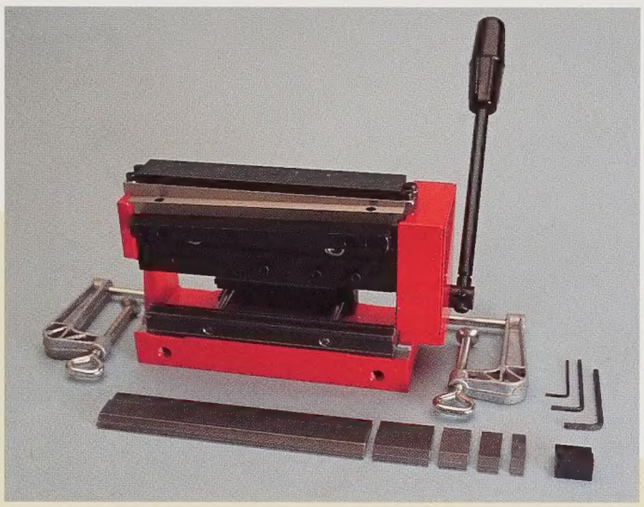

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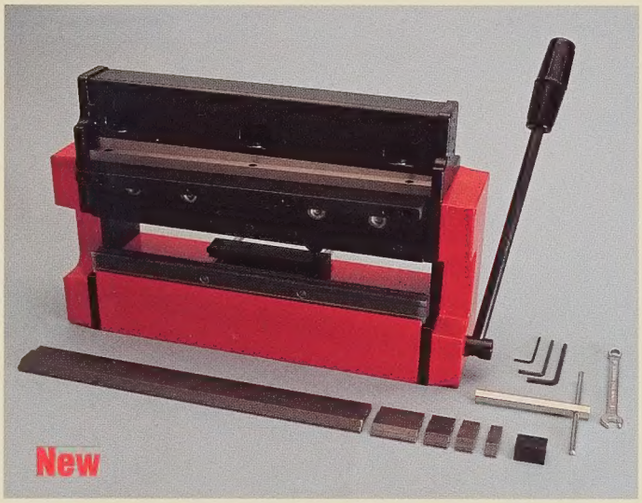

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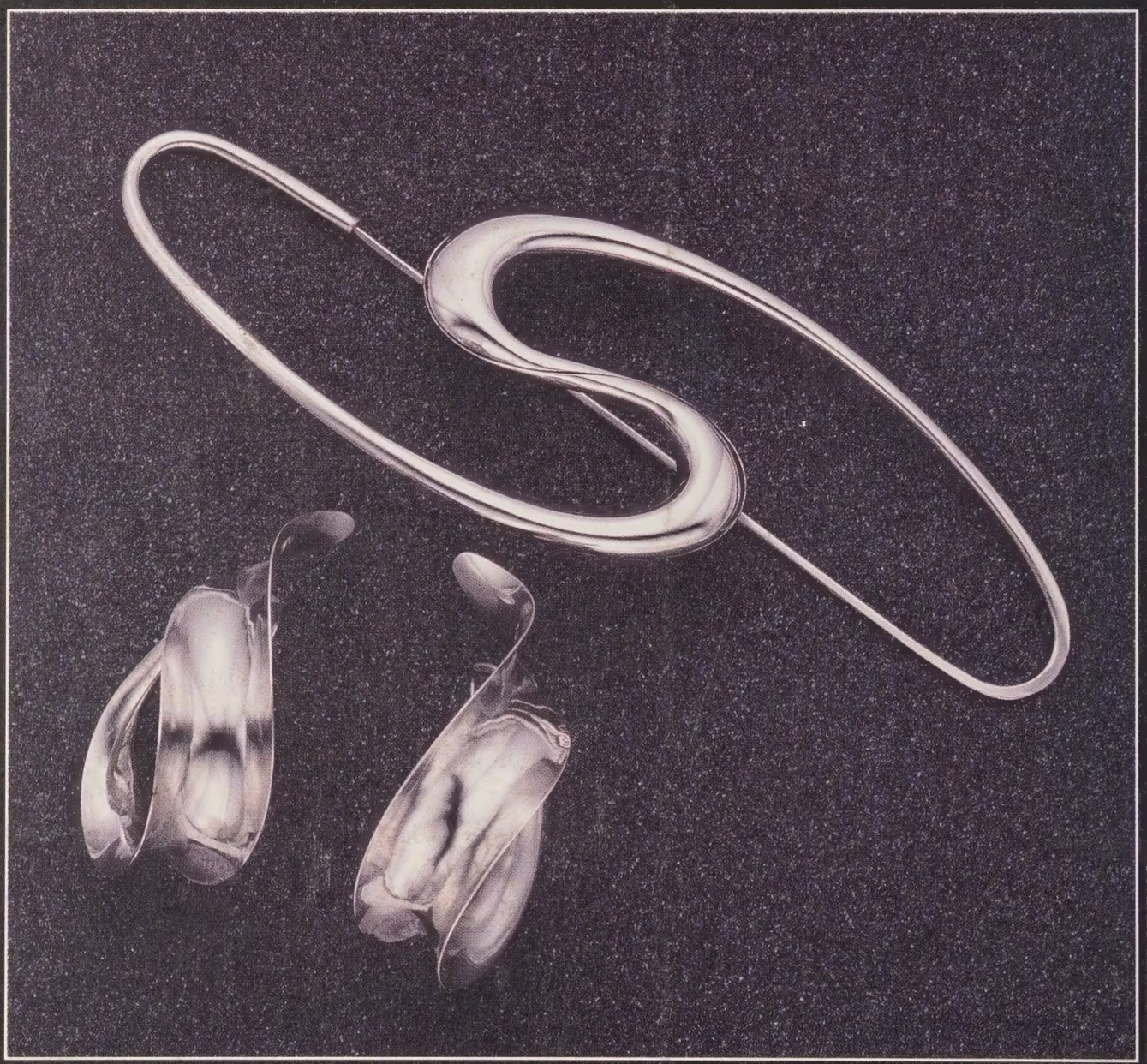

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